Ensuring Singapore's water security is about pricing it right and more

Water demand is growing while supply uncertainties abound. Despite progress over the years, meeting our water needs remains a significant challenge.

Terence Ho

The centrality of water to Singapore's existence is best summed up by then Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew's remark in a 2006 speech that "every other policy has to bend to the knees for our water survival?" Safeguarding Singapore's water security over the long term requires proactive management of both demand and supply. It takes appropriate pricing, regulation, investment as well as innovation and partnerships to keep water usage efficient, sustainable, and affordable.

On Wednesday, national water agency PUB announced an increase in the price of potable water by 50 cents per cubic meter to be implemented over 2024-26, due to the rising cost of producing and supplying water. This represents a 2.5 per cent per cubic meter increase from the last price revision in 2022. Water prices are adjusted less frequently than electricity tariffs and public transport fares.

However, each update is crucial for Singapore's sustainable management of this critical resource.

WATER SECURITY CAN'T BE TAKE FOR GRANTED

In earlier decades, periodic dry spells in Southeast Asia were a reminder of the importance of water security. Today, Singapore faces a growing array of challenges that have been exacerbated by climate change. The country's narrow geographical location and limited availability of freshwater have made it increasingly vulnerable to droughts and floods. To address these challenges, PUB has embarked on ambitious programs to increase water storage and enhance water recycling capabilities.

In 2021, Singapore's national water grid was upgraded to handle higher demand, allowing PUB to meet rising demand while managing water scarcity more effectively. The completion of the $1.7 billion Water Reuse 1 project will enable PUB to treat and supply up to 50 percent of Singapore's drinking water needs. These investments are critical to ensuring Singapore's water security in the face of increasing uncertainties.

In conclusion, proactive management of both demand and supply remains crucial to safeguarding Singapore's water security. By pricing water correctly and investing in sustainable infrastructure, Singapore can ensure a reliable and affordable supply of water for its inhabitants. As the world continues to grapple with climate change and its impacts, Singapore's efforts in this regard are commendable and serve as a model for other cities facing similar challenges. Together, we can build a resilient future that is secure in its water resources.