

# Stop logging or water supply will deplete, Kedah told

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**GEORGE TOWN:** The Penang Water Supply Corporation Sdn Bhd (PBAPP) has asked the Kedah government to stop logging activities in the Ulu Muda water catchment area.

In response to *The Star's* report yesterday on the rampant logging activities there, PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said the destruction of the Ulu Muda

forest reserve was threatening the water supply of more than two million people, thousands of businesses as well as padi irrigation.

"We extract 80% of Penang's raw water (one billion litres) from Sungai Muda daily. There are also 14 Kedah water treatment plants that extract water from Sungai Muda.

"In total, Penang and Kedah extract about 1.56 billion litres from Sungai Muda daily. Without this raw water, there will be a massive

water supply crisis in Penang and south Kedah," he told a press conference on the sidelines of the Penang state assembly sitting yesterday.

Jaseni also said billions of ringgit could be lost as thousands of businesses that were dependent on good water supply would be affected if the logging continued.

"In 2014, both Penang and Kedah contributed RM135bil to Malaysia's GDP. The reported RM30.1mil forest premium that the Kedah govern-

ment received in 2014 is a pittance compared to it," he said.

He expressed hope that the Federal authorities would be able to advise Kedah to stop the "dangerous and disastrous" business venture.

Jaseni said Ulu Muda should also be gazetted as a water catchment area so that it could be protected.

He added logging should not be allowed in water catchment areas as it would disrupt the forest's ability to help retain rainwater.

It was reported that forest roads, just 9km from the Forest Ranger's office in Gulau, Alor Setar and after crossing Sungai Sok, showed that many trees had been cleared to make way for heavy-duty vehicles plying the paths to transport logs out of the forest.

*The Star* managed to find at least five logging depots with thousands of high-quality logs such as meranti, cengal and merbau lying around, waiting to be transported to their processing destinations.

## 'Vital to gazette Ulu Muda'

Experts: Law will ensure protection of forest reserve

By ROYCE TAN  
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**ALOR SETAR:** The Ulu Muda forest reserve must be gazetted as a water catchment area to ensure the place is untouchable, say environmentalists and conservationists.

"As Kedah, Perlis and Penang have a history of major droughts and the area is already considered to be in 'water deficit', it is crucial that water catchments be protected," said Prof Dr Chan Ngai Weng of the School of Humanities at Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Dr Chan, who is dubbed Malaysia's "Waterman", said without the natural function of forests as water catchments, the function of catching and storing water would be lost.

"Destruction of water catchments will definitely occur due to logging and, at the very least, severely degrade them," he said.

Deforestation due to logging would result in exposed land surfaces such as skid roads and logging camps, which would lead to runoff



Natural resource: Logs being transported out of the Ulu Muda forest reserve. — GARY CHEN / The Star

loaded with sediments, ultimately entering the river system and polluting the water.

"There have been many cases where water treatment plants had to be closed as they could not cope with high concentrations of sediments in the water. This will further threaten water security," said Dr Chan.

He added more than 60,000 padi farmers depended on water from the dams and the impact on their families would be severe.

"The entire Ulu Muda forest needs to be gazetted either as a water catchment, a state park or a national park. Only with the pass-

ing of such laws will the area be totally protected and untouchable.

"Even with the current forest reserve status, the forest is not well protected as it can be de-gazetted for logging and development.

"It is the only way as Kedah needs the income from logging. Kedah will always eye this rich forest as long as it is 'loggable'.

"There's no point in gazetting half of it and exposing the other half. Look at Royal Belum (State Park) and Temenggor Forest Complex. The negative effects of Temenggor can be clearly seen," Dr Chan said.

Earth Lodge director and chief

executive officer Hymeir Kamarudin said the Ulu Muda forest might lose its sponge effect if logging continued to be carried out.

"Now the concern is that the logging activities might be carried out in the virgin forest on the east side bordering Thailand.

"The Ulu Muda reserve is a very important catchment area and it has to be protected.

"The Federal Government should also be involved in its protection and give compensation to states that protect nationally important sites so that they do not have to rely on it for income," he said.

### DAP man: Use copter to monitor Penang hills

**GEORGE TOWN:** Penang should buy a helicopter to monitor illegal hill clearing activities, said a DAP backbencher.

R.S.N. Rayer (DAP-Seri Delima) said it could be the most effective measure to curb the problem.

"If we have one, the excos or enforcement officers can get on board to monitor the hills from time to time," he said in response to Shariful Azhar Othman (BN-Bertam), who had urged the state government to be more proactive in addressing the issue.

He said this during his debate on the motion of thanks to the Yang di-Pertua Negri at the state assembly yesterday.

Shariful also referred to several reports by *The Star* on the illegal hill clearing activities in Sungai Ara, Relau and other hillslopes, saying that he hoped the problem would not become a "disease" in Penang.

Wong Hon Wai (DAP-Air Itam) then interjected, saying that the Federal Government should revise the laws as the problem had also surfaced in Sarawak, Cameron Highlands and Ulu Muda in Kedah.

"The current provision under the Act is insufficient as a deterrent as it involves environmental problems," he said.