

Malaysia

Penang water company warns of disruption due to Kedah logging

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PBAHB chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa asked the Kedah government to explain how logging could be carried out inside a forest reserve. — Picture by KE Ooi

PETALING JAYA, Jan 24 — Logging in Kedah's Ulu Muda Forest Reserve (UMFR) is destroying a critical catchment area and threatens to disrupt water supplies for the state and neighbouring Penang, according to PBA Holdings Bhd (PBAHB).

PBAHB chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said the area feeds water into the Ahning Dam, Muda Dam and Pedu Dam and most critically Sungai Muda, Penang's primary raw water resource.

"Essentially, about 4.09 million people in Perlis, Kedah and Penang are dependent on the UMFR as a water catchment area.

"If more trees are cut down in this forest reserve, there will come a time when the taps will run dry... and the people and businesses in our three states will suffer, he said in a statement today.

Jaseni, who also heads Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang (PBAPP), asked the Kedah government to explain how logging could be carried out inside a forest reserve.

"Why is the Kedah state government unaware of the extent of logging in the reserve and who is responsible for monitoring the status or condition of the UMFR as a water catchment area?" he said adding that his information was drawn from news reports and finding by environmental conservation group Peka.

"There should be no logging in a 'forest reserve'. One of the fundamental reasons for declaring an area as a forest reserve is to prevent it from being destroyed by logging," he said.

The logging, Jaseni said, would expose soil and debris which would wash into rivers and waterways during rains, causing heavy sedimentation in dams and rivers.

"Sedimentation reduces dam storage capacities and affects river flow. It also affects the quality of the raw water.

"Today, the raw water that Penang draws from Sungai Muda already looks like 'teh tarik', and PBAPP must treat the water carefully to ensure that it is safe for consumption," he said.

Jaseni also claimed that the area had been logged since 2008 with logging being carried out as deep as 50km inside the forest reserve.

He added that 1,200 hectares (about 12 sq km) had been designated as "new logging areas" and that water quality was already affected in the area.