

Water at Air Itam dam will last only 49 days, if dry weather continues



The water at the Air Itam dam will only last another 49 days if the current dry weather continues and residents continue to use excess water. (Bernama photo)

By **BALVIN KAUR** - March 24, 2019 @ 3:47pm

GEORGE TOWN: The water at the Air Itam dam will only last another 49 days if the current dry weather continues and residents continue to use excess water.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow appealed to the people of Air Itam, Paya Terubong and surrounding townships to start saving water, or else risk running out of water before the end of May.

The dam serves over 175,000 residents of Air Itam, Paya Terubong and Jalan Masjid Negeri.

However, the water situation in the rest of the state is normal.

He said to counter the problem in Air Itam, the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) had reduced the draw-down of raw water from the Air Itam Dam.

The water level at the dam stood at 50.3 per cent of its capacity as at 9am on Saturday. It stood at 93.9 per cent on March 22 last year, 80.4 per cent (2017), and 70.4 per cent (2016). The water level was also recorded on March 22 of those years.

“We have reduced the draw-down by 50 per cent.”

“However, the residents should not worry about reduced water pressure as we are also pumping in as much water as possible from other water treatment plants outside Air Itam area to reduce daily draw-downs from the Air Itam dam,” he said, adding that the water from other water treatment plants would also reduce reliance on the Air Itam Dam.

Chow, who is also PBAPP chairman, said once the dam’s levels drop to 40 per cent, the state would request for cloud seeding to be carried out in the area.

He said low water levels at Sungai Muda was also another cause for concern, as the river supplies 80 per cent of Penang’s water.

Chow said the river’s level had dipped below the 2m level for the past 42 days, which was considered an “alert level” for PBAPP.

He said the Kedah government had been releasing water from two dams located upstream on the river to cater to Kedah’s water demand and by extension to Penang.

Penang extracts water from the river on its side of the state border on the mainland. Meanwhile, PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said while the Air Itam Dam levels were low, works were being carried out to rectify the dam’s 98m-high abutment at a cost of RM1.6 million.

The abutment had shown signs of water erosion after it was commissioned in 1962, he said.

He said this was due to heavy bouts of rain between Sept to Nov in 2017.

Jaseni said if not repaired, it will deposit more soil into the dam, affecting the raw water quality in the long run.

He said repair work was also to ensure the structural integrity of the dam and a road that surrounds its perimeter is retained.

The works are scheduled to be completed by end of July, with works being 54 per cent complete now.