

Penang alarmed over extensive logging in Kedah affecting water supply

Predeep Nambiar -

April 25, 2019 5:29 PM



Penang, Kedah and Perlis heavily rely on the Sungai Muda, which runs from the forest reserve, for their water supply. (Facebook pic)

GEORGE TOWN: A water utility company today said Putrajaya should widen its protection of areas beyond the Ulu Muda forest reserve as more jungles are being cleared in remote parts of Kedah near Kuala Nerang.

Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBA) CEO Jaseni Maidinsa said with news that the Bukit Keramat forest had been authorised for clearing by the previous Kedah government, the federal government ought to step up efforts to protect water catchment areas there.

A large tract of forest close to the Ahning Dam, near Bukit Keramat, 25km north of the large Ulu Muda forest reserve, was reportedly cleared with permission from the local authorities there.

The Ahning Dam is among four dams in Kedah, the others being the Pedu, Beris and Muda dams.

In a statement, Jaseni said the report was shocking as PBA had on many occasions called for the main water catchment area for the northern region — the greater Ulu Muda Forest Reserve — to be protected.

He said the only way to protect it was through proper laws, strict enforcement and fair compensation to Kedah for losing logging revenue to keep Ulu Muda safe in perpetuity.



"How many hectares of 'forest reserve lands' have been approved for logging by the former Kedah state government in water catchment areas, including the 163,103ha of rainforests in Ulu Muda?"

"Are these approvals still valid with the change in state government? Is the Kedah Forestry Department issuing more permits for logging 'independently'?"

"Is the ban on logging in Ulu Muda a blanket ban that covers all 163,103ha of the Greater Ulu Muda Forest Complex that serves as a regional water catchment area?"

Jaseni Maidinsa

"Which government department is enforcing the ban on logging in Ulu Muda, as announced in September 2018?"

Jaseni was responding to The Star's report that the previous Kedah administration had approved 1,400ha of forest reserve land to be cleared on Aug 1, 2017.

Of the 1,400ha site, close to 700ha of the forest have been cleared.

The daily also quoted the Department of Environment as saying that no environmental impact assessment was done for the logging, despite a requirement to do so.

The present Kedah government was not aware of the logging, the report read.

Meanwhile, at a different event, Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said the Ulu Muda forest reserve ought to be protected for the sake of water security for the northern states.

He said Penang, Kedah and Perlis heavily relied on the Sungai Muda, which runs from the forest reserve, and that it should be protected from any form of destruction.

"The federal government is now looking at compensating the state for the loss in revenue so we hope the federal government will gazette Ulu Muda as soon as possible," he said on the sidelines of a Water Security Conference here today.

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