

Rare earth mining will affect water supply in Perlis, Kedah and Penang - PBAPP

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GEORGE TOWN, Dec 7 -- Mineral exploration permits for the mining of rare earth elements at Ulu Muda water catchment areas including in Sik and Baling, Kedah, which have been approved by the Kedah State Government, will affect the water supply for 4.2 million people in Perlis, Kedah and Penang, says Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa.

He said the large-scale exploration operations at the 163,000-hectare Ulu Muda Forest Reserve Complex would involve clearing off large areas of land wherever the minerals were found.

"Tree felling, hill leveling, works involving the setting up of large quarries and digging into the ground will cause great destruction to the rainforest environment.

"Mining will also adversely affect Sungai Muda, a strategic raw water source," he said in a statement here today.

He said the water catchment area in Ulu Muda was an important component of the water supply network in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) that meets the needs of residents and businesses in Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

"About 70 per cent of Perlis' raw water and 96 per cent of Kedah's raw water come from Ulu Muda while more than 80 per cent of the raw water abstracted by PBAPP from Sungai Muda, at the water inlet in Lahar Tiang, Penang, comes from Ulu Muda.

"Therefore, Ulu Muda cannot continue to function as the main natural water catchment area for the three NCER states if its rainforest is cut down, its hills leveled, and its landscape ruined by mining operations," he said.

Jaseni added that the large-scale mining operation would also produce large amounts of toxic waste, debris and contaminated soil, leading to adverse environmental and health impacts.

"The operation will complicate the process of disposing of by-products, besides contaminating the surface water system in the Sungai Muda river basin and affecting thousands of businesses seeking to revive their operations in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic," he said.

He also urged the Ministry of Environment and Water (KASA), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy (NRE) and the National Security Council (MKN) to work together to immediately stop the exploration and mining process which is deemed dangerous.

"KASA, NRE and MKN must ensure that Kedah does not endanger the water supply in NCER states, namely Perlis, Kedah and Penang, which have contributed around RM147.8 billion to the country's coffers in 2019, and areas of livelihood for about 4.2 million people," he said.