

## Putrajaya must stop Kedah's rare earth venture, says Penang water authority

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

GEORGE TOWN: The Penang Water Supply Corp (PBA) has criticised Kedah's move to mine rare earths elements (REE) in protected areas, calling for Putrajaya to act against any such attempt.

Its CEO, Jaseni Maidinsa, said one of the areas being explored for REE was the Ulu Muda forest reserve, a key water catchment which serves about 4.2 million people in Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

He said about 70% of Perlis' raw water and 96% of Kedah's raw water originate from Ulu Muda. Penang takes 80% of raw water from Sungai Muda, which is directly connected to the catchment.

"Mining REE in Ulu Muda will inevitably put water supply services for the three states in peril. The Kedah menteri besar has conveniently forgotten that Ulu Muda is the largest and most important water catchment area in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER).

"The federal ministries must work together to stop this dangerous venture immediately," he said in a statement today.

Jaseni said that despite assurances of just exploration, not mining, by the Kedah government, the destruction of Ulu Muda would be inevitable.

He said trees would have to be cut and hills flattened to eventually mine the rare earths, while the resulting debris and toxic waste would have disastrous environmental and health impacts.

"It would also pollute and contaminate water systems in the Muda River Basin.

"Huge quarries would have to be established and a lot of earth would be dug. It will be a monumental destruction in the rainforest environment," he said.

Recently, the Kedah government announced that it had hired a company to explore for REEs worth RM62 billion in the Sik, Ulu Muda and Baling districts.