

Kedah's mining venture will disrupt water supply in 3 states State's decision to approve 'rare earth elements' mining project will dry taps of 4.2 million people

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GEORGE TOWN – The Kedah government's decision to approve a large-scale mining venture in the Ulu Muda catchment area will disrupt water supply in three northern states in Peninsular Malaysia affecting some 4.2 million people.

State Water Supply Corp CEO Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said Ulu Muda is the largest and most important water catchment area in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER), supplying water to Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

“The large-scale mining operations in the 163,000-ha Greater Ulu Muda Forest Complex will involve large-scale land clearing in areas where the minerals are found.

“There is no way that such operations in Ulu Muda can be conducted without decimating rainforests that entrap rainwater that flows into the main Sg Muda as raw water,” Jaseni said in a statement today.

Kedah Menteri Besar Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor had last week approved a permit for a company to explore large-scale mining of minerals, referred to as “rare earth elements”, in Ulu Muda, Sik and Baling.

Jaseni said the Environment and Water Ministry (KASA), Natural Resources and Energy Ministry (NRE) and National Security Council (NSC) must work together to stop this dangerous venture immediately.

In this context, Jaseni said, Ulu Muda is the first link in the NCER water supply value-chain that meets the water needs of people and economic activities in Perlis, Kedah and Penang.

“About 70% of Perlis' and 96% of Kedah's raw water originate from Ulu Muda,” he said, adding that more than 80% of the daily raw water that is sourced from Sg Muda at the Lahar Tiang Intake in Penang originated from Ulu Muda.

Jaseni said Ulu Muda cannot continue to function as a primary natural water catchment area for the three states if rainforests are cut down, its hills flattened and its landscape scarred by mining operations.

“The potential damage is likely to be permanent”.

He also said, in the case of large-scale mining, the threat is not limited to a shortage of raw water from Ulu Muda, but the quality of the raw water from the river will also be compromised.

In that regard, KASA, NRE and NSC must ensure that Kedah does not jeopardise the water supply security of Perlis, Kedah and Penang, which ensures the livelihoods of 4.2 million people -