

PBAPP warns of looming water crisis in Penang, Kedah



(File pic) PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said it could no longer support the Sungai Muda river level during the ongoing dry season. -NSTP/ SHAHNAZ FAZLIE SHAHRIZAL

By Audrey Dermawan
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GEORGE TOWN: The Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) has issued a third alert of a looming water crisis in the northern states after Kedah's Muda Dam water level dropped to a critical 7.44 per cent yesterday.

As a result, PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said it could no longer support the Sungai Muda river level during the ongoing dry season, leaving the Sungai Muda river highly dependent on only one dam -- the Beris Dam.

He said PBAPP was only able to obtain the water level reading for the Beris Dam until last Thursday at 69.87 per cent.

He said to sustain the Sungai Muda's water level, the Beris Dam released about 864 million litres of water per day (MLD). Beris Dam's capacity is 120 billion litre.

"Yesterday, the Sungai Muda's level at Penang's Lahar Tiang intake was at the alert level of 1.77m. The normal river level was above 2.0m.

"As of today, PBAPP is still able to optimise abstraction of raw water from Sungai Muda for treatment at the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (Sungai Dua WTP).

"The Sungai Dua WTP produces more than 80 per cent of the treated water that is supplied in the state.

"If the Beris Dam does not have sufficient water to release and sustain the Sungai Muda river level, there will be widespread water crises in Penang and southern Kedah.

"As such, it is important for the Kedah government and the Federal government to formulate a contingency plan to 'support' or 'protect' water supply services in Penang and southern Kedah in case of a prolonged dry season," he said today.

PBAPP had issued the first warning last month, urging the state's water consumers not to waste water, after water level at two key dams on the island fell to historic low.

Besides Penang's Lahar Tiang intake, a total of 14 Kedah water treatment plants also abstracted water from Sungai Muda daily for water supply in Southern Kedah.

Since 1973, Sungai Muda has served as Penang's primary raw water resource. Today, more than 80 per cent of Penang's raw water is abstracted from this river.

Jaseni said in this current scenario, cloud seeding to induce rain in the catchment areas of the Beris Dam and Muda Dam, as well as the Sungai Muda river basin, must be prioritised and expedited by the relevant authorities and agencies.

He said it was critical to ensure that the raw water reserves of the Beris Dam could last until the rainy season arrives.

"As a counter measure, PBAPP is drawing down on the strategic reserves of the 73.5 billion litre Mengkuang Dam to complement raw water abstraction from Sungai Muda. As of yesterday, the effective capacity of the Mengkuang Dam was at 72.8 per cent.

"The volume of water from the Mengkuang Dam should be enough to support Penang's raw water needs until July 2020.

"However, PBAPP is only able to draw down a maximum of 300 MLD from the Mengkuang Dam, while Penang's average daily consumption of treated water was 843 MLD in 2019.

"Although we have a counter measure in the form of the Mengkuang Dam, we are still highly dependent on raw water from Sungai Muda, on a daily basis.

"As such, we are raising the alarm for urgent actions to be taken by Kedah and the Federal governments to ensure 'no water rationing' in Penang and southern Kedah in 2020." he added.