

Penang issues alert as water at dams falls to 'historic' levels

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PBA CEO Jaseni Maidinsa (right) showing a comparison table denoting a drop in water level at dams with Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow in Komtar today.

GEORGE TOWN: The water authority in Penang has sounded the alarm for residents to save water as the water level at two key dams on the island has fallen to lows it describes as “historic”.

The Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBA) today pleaded to water users in the state — the highest water users in the country, with 280 litres per person consumption last year — to cut down on water use.

The national average is 209 litres per day, which is also higher than the UN recommendation of 165 litres per day.

PBA said with sparse rainfall in the last four months, Penangites must urgently cut down water use, especially until April, when rain was expected.”

PBA CEO Jaseni Maidinsa expects intense rainfall only in April based on analysis of 70 years of rainfall data.

He said as of yesterday (Jan 14), the water level at the Air Itam dam was at 62% and the Teluk Bahang dam at 39.5%.

Jaseni said it was much lower than the average of 85% to 93% recorded on Jan 14 in the past three years.

He said the low rainfall recorded at the Teluk Bahang dam was telling with just 1,732mm between Sept to Dec last year. This is only half of the three-year average of 3,101mm.



“Usually, by Christmas every year, the dams should be full as there would be intense rain. But there was not much rain. With the onset of the 2020 dry season, we must make sure that our dam reserves can last until the rains arrive, either in April or May,” he said at a press conference with the chief minister today.

Jaseni said for the time being, PBA was going to rely less on the dams and would optimise the drawing of water from Sungai Muda in the mainland.

He also advised the Chinese community to cut down on water use in the next two weeks, especially when they clean their homes before their new year.

Jaseni said the advice was directed to the community because the Air Itam dam often dropped by 15% during the Chinese New Year period over the years.

“Avoid using a hose to clean your home. Use a broom and a mop to clean your home.”

At the same conference, Penang Agriculture Committee chairman Dr Afif Bahardin said the agriculture department had deployed water pumps in the vast padi fields in the northern reaches of Seberang Perai.

He said additional pumps were being installed to draw water directly from Sungai Muda to aid with the watering of 1,600ha of padi fields, farmed by about 800 farmers.

Last week, about 100 farmers in Pinang Tunggol, Paya Keladi and Pantai Kamloong had complained about the inadequate water supply to irrigate padi fields which had dried up.