

Penang takes over dam project from Putrajaya



By **Marina Emmanuel** - October 1, 2020 @ 11:00am



*The Federal government will be handing over the completed Phase 1 and Phase 2A of the Mengkuang Dam expansion project to the Penang government soon.
FILE PIC*

GEORGE TOWN: The Penang state government has agreed to "take back" the expanded Mengkuang Dam from the federal government.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said the state had agreed to the handover of Phase 1 and Phase 2A of the Mengkuang Dam expansion project on Sept 24, during a meeting with the Water and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man in Putrajaya.

"It was a productive meeting and we are looking forward to the timely implementation of Phases 2B and 2C of the expansion project, as well as the construction of a new barrage at Rantau Panjang in Penang," he said in a statement yesterday.

Chow said the state was also told by Tuan Ibrahim during the meeting that land acquisition was in the final stages for the implementation of Phase 2B.

"The minister also informed us that studies on Phase 2C and the construction of a new barrage at Rantau Panjang will be discussed with the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Prime Minister's Department for implementation."

"Since the ministry has stated its intent to complete Phases 2B and 2C of the expansion project for the dam, Penang agreed to the handover," Chow added, saying that an official ceremony was slated for Oct 26 at the grounds of the Mengkuang Dam.

Meanwhile, state-owned water services supplier, Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang and its holding company PBA Holdings Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa, categorised the Mengkuang Dam expansion project as a "critical strategic drought project for Penang."

"It (the project) is a federal government project financed by a federal grant, and its implementation was one of the key conditions that was agreed upon when Penang migrated to the National Water Services Restructuring Initiative (NWSRI) in 2011."

Jaseni noted that while the expansion work was incomplete, it was prudent for the state to reassume the management of the Mengkuang Dam.

"Due to abnormally low rainfall, resulting from climate change since last year, the effective capacities of the Air Itam Dam and Teluk Bahang Dam on Penang Island are abnormally low," he said.

"We will need full access to the raw water reserves of the Mengkuang Dam to manage continuous water supply services during the next dry season, which is expected to start from January," he added, saying that the primary rationale for the handover of the expansion project was risk management.

In stressing the need for the two remaining phases of the project to be expedited, Jaseni said: "Without the Phase 2B pipeline, the maximum volume of water that may be drawn down from the dam is limited to 300 million litres per day (MLD). Last year, Penang's average daily water consumption was 843 MLD.

"As such," he added, "a maximum drawdown of 300 MLD was insufficient to meet Penang's treated water needs during an emergency drought scenario.

"Without the Phase 2C Lahar Yooi Pumping Station, we cannot pump raw water from Sungai Muda to refill the Mengkuang Dam quickly during the annual wet seasons.

"Penang needs a fully completed expansion project as soon as possible as we are a water-stressed state that is facing significant raw water risks in this age of climate change," Jaseni added.