

Penang sounds red alert over Kulim airport next to river

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An artist's impression of the proposed Kulim International Airport. (Facebook pic).

GEORGE TOWN: Penang told Kedah today that its plans to build the Kulim airport by the banks of Sungai Muda will jeopardise water supply for millions in the southern part of the state and in Penang.

The Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) said an environmental study by the airport builders showed a high chance of pollution of Sungai Muda, as at least 14km of the project will be located on its banks as part of a 4,000ha aerotropolis which will include other property development.

As much as 80% of Penang's water supply is abstracted from the river in the state near Kepala Batas. The new airport is located at the edge of Penang's border near Pinang Tunggal in Seberang Perai.

PBAPP CEO Jaseni Maidinsa said that according to environmental impact assessment (EIA) documents, the airport will be located along Sungai Muda in two parts, spanning a length of 14km.

"We do not begrudge Kedah's ambitions to pursue a new international airport project that is anticipated to bring in approximately RM3.8 billion in private investment, expected to be injected into the local economy by the provision of jobs and infrastructure," he said in a statement.

"However, an airport cannot be built in a location that places water supply services in Penang and southern Kedah at high risk, now and in the future.

"It would be prudent to relocate this massive project to a safer place, away from the banks of Sungai Muda, the primary raw water resource for Penang and southern Kedah."

Jaseni said the airport's own environment consultants in the EIA listed possible water quality impact concerns from stockpiles of earth spoils, cement and sand as possible sources of pollutants to the river, including concerns of oil spills and hazardous chemicals.

Kedah has signed a deal with private developer ECK Group to build the airport by 2026, with the company to spend RM6 billion in the first phase.

The airport is slated to be located on a 1,700ha site near Sidam Kiri near Sungai Petani and is expected to handle 15 million passengers a year once completed. The state had earlier expected its first flights as early as 2024.