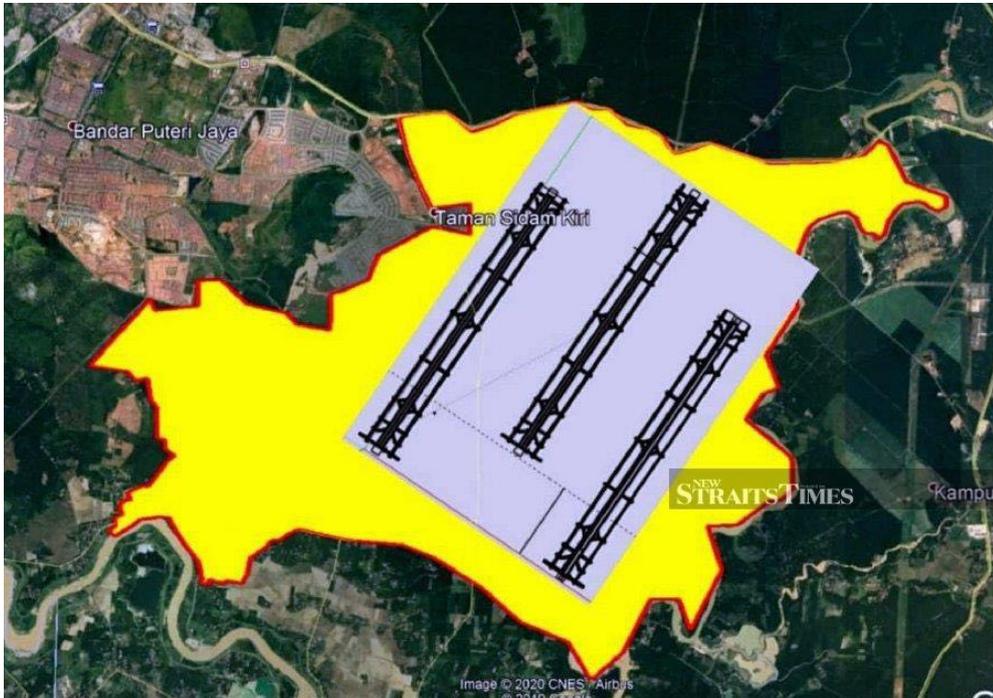


Proposed Kulim airport project must not jeopardise water supply in Penang

By **Audrey Dermawan** - August 23, 2021



An overview of the proposed Kulim International Airport . - NSTP file pic

GEORGE TOWN: The proposed construction of the Kulim International Airport (KXP) in Kedah should not be carried out at the expense of the people, said the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP).

Its chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said this follows the revelation in the environmental impact assessment (EIA) report for the KXP project that the project may contaminate Sungai Muda, and jeopardise water supply in Penang.

"We (PBAPP) do not begrudge Kedah's ambition to pursue a new international airport project that is expected to bring in an approximated RM3.8 billion in private investments expected to be injected into the local economy by the provision of jobs and infrastructure.

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

"As such, it will 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 south Kedah," he said today.

The KXP project location is in Mukim Sidam Kiri, Kuala Muda, Kedah.

Based on the EIA, the major components of the KXP are the:

- * Airport and airport city;
- * Aerotropolis (a business, commercial and industrial park);
- * SLAM hub (an aerospace, logistics and manufacturing hub); and
- * Other developments (settlements, flood mitigation plans and roads).

All the major components are projected to occupy 3,982.51 hectares of land.

Of particular concern, Jaseni said, was the fact that the KXP project would be located adjacent to two sections of the riverbanks of Sungai Muda, spanning a total length of about 14km.

He said Sungai Muda had served as the primary source of raw water for south Kedah and Penang since 1974.

He added that PBAPP abstracted more than 80 per cent of the raw water that Penang needed daily from its Lahar Tiang Intake in Seberang Prai, about 6km downstream (as the river flows) from the proposed KXP project location.

"The raw water that is abstracted at Lahar Tiang is treated at the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (Sungai Dua WTP) in Seberang Prai.

"In 2020, more than 80 per cent of the treated water in Penang was produced at the Sungai Dua WTP.

"Moreover, last year's laboratory test results showed that treated water supplied in Penang was among the cleanest, safest and healthiest in Malaysia (even in a global pandemic year), in terms of compliance to the National Drinking Water Quality Assurance Programme set by the Ministry of Health (MOH).

"As such, a massive development project along the banks of Sungai Muda must not endanger or jeopardise 24/7 water supply services that support the well-being of 1.78 million people and thousands of businesses that operate in Penang," he stressed.

Meanwhile, Jaseni said the Penang government and PBAPP were not consulted or asked for feedback on the potential risks and negative impacts of the KXP project.

"This is odd in light of the fact that the Department of Environment (DOE) in the Ministry of Environment and Water (KASA) did consult PBAPP regarding the EIA assessment for a proposed 'green technology paper plant' located along the banks of Sungai Muda.

"In an official reply to that consultation, dated July 19, this year, PBAPP stated that Penang and south Kedah would face a raw water threat with severe repercussions if Sungai Muda were to be contaminated (by the operations of the proposed green technology paper plant).

"If Sungai Muda is contaminated, PBAPP will have no choice but to stop abstracting water from the Lahar Tiang Intake to protect public health.

"The 'fallout' will be that more than a million people in Penang will have no water supply," he said, highlighting that any effluent that is discharged into Sungai Muda must comply not only with the DOE but also the Health Ministry's water quality parameters for potable water supply.

On Aug 2, the Kedah state government signed a joint venture agreement with ECK Group to build the KXP.

It was reported that with the signing of an agreement between the ECK Group and KXP Airportcity Sdn Bhd (state owned company), KXP might be built by 2026.

The first phase of the airport construction, by 2026, would cost RM6 billion including the cost of land acquisition.

A special purpose vehicle would be formed with ECK Group holding 80 per cent and the balance to be held by KXP Airportcity Sdn Bhd.