

Relocate proposed Kulim airport project to avoid water contamination, PBA Holdings tells developers

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KUALA LUMPUR (Aug 23): PBA Holdings Bhd, a water utility company that serves Penang, has called on developers of the proposed Kulim International Airport (KXP) in Kuala Muda, Kedah to relocate the massive project to a place away from the banks of Sungai Muda, which is the primary raw water resource for Penang and south Kedah.

Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa, the chief executive officer of PBA and its wholly-owned subsidiary Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang Sdn Bhd (PBAPP), said PBAPP "does not begrudge" Kedah's ambition to pursue a new international airport project that is expected to bring in an approximate RM3.8 billion in private investments and this amount is expected to be injected into the local economy by the provision of jobs and

infrastructure.

"But 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. It would be prudent to relocate this massive project to a 'safer' place, away from the banks of Sungai Muda," he added in a statement today. The Penang state government owns a 55% stake in PBA, while Penang Development Corp holds another 10%.

The KXP project is being jointly developed by the Kedah government and ECK Group. The first phase of the project is expected to cost RM6 billion, which includes land acquisition costs.

According to Jaseni, an environmental impact assessment (EIA) report prepared by AGV Environment Sdn Bhd revealed that the proposed project may contaminate Sungai Muda and thereby disrupt water supply services in Penang.

Occupying 3,982.51ha of land, the major components of the KXP are the airport and airport city, an aerotropolis comprising a business, commercial and industrial park, an aerospace, logistics and manufacturing hub and other developments such as settlements, flood mitigation plans and roads.

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

"Sungai Muda has served as the primary source of raw water for South Kedah and Penang since 1974. PBAPP abstracts more than 80% of the raw water that Penang needs 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 in Seberang Perai. In 2020, more than 80% of the treated water in Penang was produced at the Sungai Dua WTP," he explained.

"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 added.

Jaseni also noted that the Penang government and PBAPP were not consulted or asked for feedback on the potential risks and negative impacts of the KXP project, vis-a-vis water supply services in Penang.

"Sungai Muda is the primary raw water resource for Penang and south Kedah. Any mishap involving Sungai Muda would inevitably result in a water supply catastrophe in Penang and South Kedah.

"The proposed location of the Kulim Airport is not ideal. Its location, along the riverbanks of Sungai Muda, presents direct and unnecessary risks for water supply operations in Penang and south Kedah," he said.