

Penang to sue Kedah if Sungai Muda project threatens water supply

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GEORGE TOWN, March 25 -- The Penang government would call for legal action against Kedah if any project implemented on the Sungai Muda threatens the water supply in Penang, said Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow.

He said that any Sungai Muda project in Kedah upstream of Penang's Lahar Tiang intake must comply with all relevant laws and not adversely affect or compromise water supply services for 1.776 million people in Penang.

He pointed out that the state has been legally abstracting raw water from Sungai Muda without paying Kedah since 1973.

"Penang has never signed any agreement, memorandum of understanding or contract to pay Kedah. If his (Kedah Menteri Besar's) project affects Penang in an adverse manner, we will act promptly to stop it immediately," he said in a statement today.

Chow said that their options to stop an adverse project include submitting an official objection to the Federal government, raising objections for debate in parliament and initiating legal action to obtain a court injunction to stop that project.

"We are confident that Kedah has no legal standing to demand for any payment, this is why we are ready to see them in court," he added,

He was responding to Kedah Menteri Besar Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor's statement yesterday (March 24) that the state government planned to implement a riverside water catchment project known as Takungan Air Pinggiran Sungai (TAPS) to stabilise Sungai Muda's water level during the dry season.

He said new barrages will also be built to stabilise the river water level to ensure state water concessionaire Syarikat Air Darul Aman Sdn Bhd's pumps would not be rendered inoperable when water levels drop.

Muhammad Sanusi also said that the Kedah government had never closed its doors on Penang for negotiations over the water supply issue and welcomed discussions to set the rate for raw water charges.

Meanwhile, Chow said the Penang government would be reviewing the "Penang Water Supply Initiative 2050" (PWSI 2050) projects proposed by Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang Sdn Bhd (PBAPP), the state's water concessionaire .

He said that PWSI 2050 projects were originally conceptualised to ensure water supply security for Penang over the next 30 years, with the continuing availability of a certain volume of raw water from Sungai Muda and the potential of the Sungai Perak Raw Water Transfer Project (SPRWTS).

"We will now look into implementing more strategic projects under the PWSI 2050 to mitigate the risks of potential 'mishaps' involving Sungai Muda that may affect water supply services in Penang in the future," he said, adding that the measures may involve alternative water technologies and incur higher water supply costs and tariffs.