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Minister should see himself as a Federal minister and not a PAS minister, Penang CM fires salvo at Water Minister



PENANG will continue to uphold the law and defend the state's riparian rights to extract raw water, without charges, from a river that flows through its state territory.

Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said that Penang had always stressed on upholding the law and defending the international convention.

"Penang has the right to use the raw water from Sungai Muda which flows through our state territory. We extract raw water from Sungai Muda in Penang territory," Chow told a group of journalists after presenting the state flags to the Penang contingent who will be competing in the 20th Sukma (Malaysia Games) this year.

Environmental and Water Resources Minister Datuk Seri Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man had recently commented that 'Penang is morally obligated to pay Kedah for water it takes from a river shared by both states'. It was reported by a news portal that Tuan Ibrahim spoke to reporters at the sidelines of the gathering of PAS' Youth, Muslimat and Ulama wings at the party's headquarters at Kota Sarang Semut.

Chow questioned if the statement by the minister means that 'one bears no responsibility in the eyes of the law?'

"As I have said, Penang has always stressed on upholding the law and defending the international convention.

"We have brought the matter up many times. This is a national issue and not just involving one or two states.

"At least three states (Perlis, Kedah, and Penang) will be impacted if the raw water quality of Sungai Muda is affected due to activities such as logging or mining.

“Bear in mind that not only Penang will be impacted, but at least three states in Malaysia. Hence, this is a national issue that needed the Federal Government’s attention and action.

“I feel that the said minister should see himself as a Federal minister and not a PAS minister.

“This is because the other party involved is the state under the PAS administration.

“The said minister, as a Federal minister, has the responsibility to ensure all states in Malaysia have a sufficient raw water supply.

“He must play his role to address any weaknesses faced by the states, should there be any. That is his responsibility as a minister!” Chow said.

Chow (centre) replying to the questions by the media. With him are Penang Youth and Sports Committee chairman Soon Lip Chee (left) and Penang State Sports Council director Harry Chai.

Chow added that he has met with two Water ministers so far – former Water, Land, and Natural Resources Minister Dr A. Xavier Jayakumar and the current Minister Tuan Ibrahim.

“However, nothing fruitful has happened.

“Penang will continue to bring up this issue in all the Federal meetings which I am invited to attend,” Chow said.

It was reported by a news portal that Deputy Chief Minister II Prof Dr P. Ramasamy had also berated Tuan Ibrahim for his statement.

He has called for the formation of a regional water authority to resolve the altercation with Kedah over the extraction of raw water from Sungai Muda.

In a statement, Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) chief executive officer Datuk Seri Jaseni Maidinsa said that Tuan Ibrahim should work on securing Federal compensation for Kedah instead of trying to force Penang to pay Kedah for water from Sungai Muda.

“He is a Federal minister. His salary is paid by the Federal Government and his ministry has access to Federal funds.

“He should be aware that the people and businesses in Penang pay billions of ringgit in Federal taxes to the Federal Government every year.

“Penang accounted for an estimated RM94.7 billion in GDP contribution and an estimated RM10.5 billion in Federal tax revenue in 2019.

“On the other hand, the Penang government tabled a 2022 state budget with a projected deficit of RM449.8 million. As such, asking Penang to pay Kedah for raw water is akin to an act of trying to squeeze water from a stone,” he said.

Jaseni said: “If the minister feels strongly that Kedah should be compensated to conserve Ulu Muda, he should focus on Federal compensation for Kedah. It is, after all, his job, and his responsibility.”

He added that Tuan Ibrahim should ‘face the facts’, instead of talking about ‘a moral obligation’.

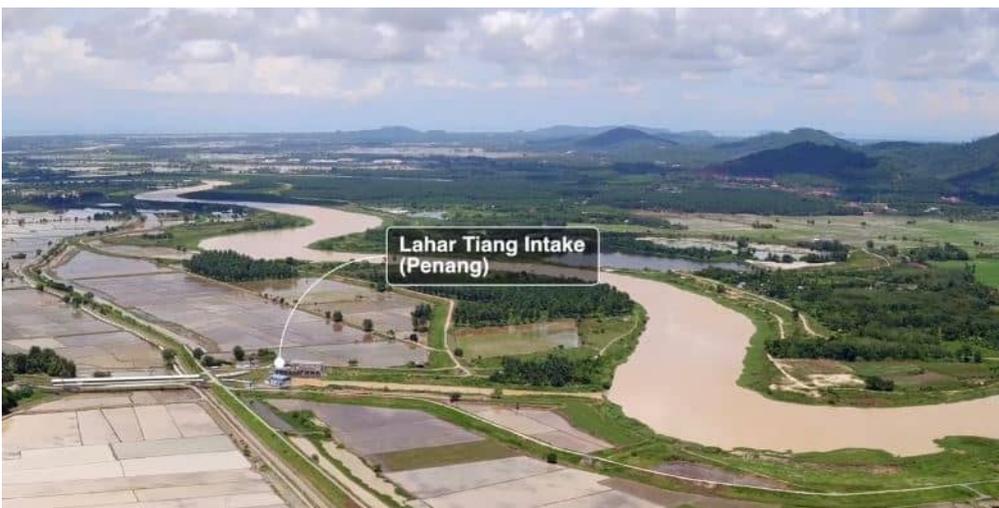
“Penang does not pay Kedah for raw water from Sungai Muda because there is no legal obligation that compels Penang to pay for raw water abstracted from Sungai Muda.

“The mid-point of a stretch of Sungai Muda defines part of the boundary of Penang and Kedah. On its part, PBAPP extracts raw water from Sungai Muda in Penang territory.



Penang extracts raw water from Sungai Muda in Penang territory.

“PBAPP’s Lahar Tiang Intake is located in Seberang Perai, and not in Kedah. As such, PBAPP pays the Penang government raw water fees for abstracting raw water from Sungai Muda that flows through Penang.



The Lahar Tiang Intake in Seberang Perai.

“It is a fact that Ulu Muda, the water catchment area for Sungai Muda, is in Kedah. However, the conservation of Ulu Muda does not only benefit Penang. Kedah and Perlis are equally dependent on rainwater collected in Ulu Muda rainforests that subsequently flows into Sungai Muda.

“Perlis, Kedah, and Penang are three states within Malaysia’s Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER). In this context, Ulu Muda and Sungai Muda should be rightfully regarded as ‘NCER water assets’ that serve three NCER states,” Jaseni said.

He added that the Penang government and PBAPP are fully supportive of the provision of Federal Government funds to Kedah for the sustainable and long-term conservation of Ulu Muda and Sungai Muda.

“However, it is up to the Minister of Environment and Water to get the job done,” Jaseni said.

Story by Christopher Tan

Pix by Siew Chia En and courtesy of PBAPP

Video by Adleena Rahayu Ahmad Radzi