

Putrajaya must approve Perak raw water transfer immediately, says Penang CM

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Penang chief minister Chow Kon Yeow and state officials surveying the Sungai Dua water treatment plant, which was inundated with muddy water from the Baling floods. (Penang CM's office pic)

GEORGE TOWN: Penang chief minister Chow Kon Yeow has urged the federal government to immediately approve a water pipeline from Perak to a river close to its northern border in order to ensure water security for the state and its neighbours.

He said after Penang's water supply interruption yesterday due to the flooding in Baling, Kedah, the Sungai Perak raw water transfer scheme was needed as a backup water source and also for the benefit of the people in lower Kedah and upper Perak.

Chow said initially, the Perak water transfer was to meet Penang's future demand by 2030, but given the recent incident, the alternative water source would help dilute muddy or turbid waters.

"We need a policy decision from the federal government to handle the problem which will stunt growth in Penang, Kedah and north Perak.

"If this is not done quickly, it will adversely affect the people in Penang and the billion-ringgit industries that are contributing to the national GDP (gross domestic product)," he told reporters today.

Chow said Penang had proposed the raw water pipe from Sungai Perak back in 2009, but Putrajaya never moved forward with the plan. Major water infrastructure is typically under federal purview.

"With Perak's raw water, we can cover the Seberang Perai central and south districts. The Baling floods have opened our eyes, where our water source can be muddied so badly that we can't treat it well enough for human consumption," he said.

Some of the mud collected through various filters at the Sungai Dua water treatment plant. (Penang CM's office pic)

Currently, Penang relies on Sungai Muda for water supply for 80% of its population and to meet demands until 2025. The proposed Perak water pipeline will connect Sungai Perak to Sungai Ijok, also in Perak, which is connected to Sungai Kerian, a river that flows through Penang territory.



Penang would then build a water treatment plant on its side of Sungai Kerian and process water from there.

The pipeline, previously reported to cost at least RM2 billion, was approved in 2012, but never took off. It would take seven years to build.

In recent times, Perak has refused to give Penang water, saying it needed water for its people, contrary to previous expert findings showing Sungai Perak had more than enough to meet the needs of the Perak population.

Previous Perak government leaders were against the raw water transfer but were okay with selling Penang treated water at 70 sen per litre.

Penang is presently going through a water supply disruption in selected areas after a four-hour shutdown of its main water treatment plant yesterday.

However, the authorities say the situation is expected to be normalised by 10pm today, with its main water treatment plant in Butterworth returning to its normal levels at an average of 988 million litres a day.