

April 25, 2023

Penang cloud seeding likely to start end of this month



The Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) aircraft, from the end of this month, may carry out cloud seeding operations over the water catchment areas on Penang island. - BERNAMA Pic

GEORGE TOWN: The Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) aircraft, from the end of this month, may carry out cloud seeding operations over the water catchment areas on Penang island.

The Malaysian Meteorological Department (METMalaysia) has recommended the timeframe from April 29 to May 7 for the first wave of operations to be carried out over Penang.

The RMAF aircraft, to be deployed for the operations, is likely to take off from the Subang Air Base in Selangor.

Arrangements are being made for a Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) representative to witness the cloud seeding operations first-hand.

PBAPP chief executive officer K. Pathmanathan said the weather condition during the timeframe should be ideal to maximise the impact of the cloud seeding operations.

He said PBAPP would report on the outcome of the first wave of cloud seeding operations when completed, in relation to the status of the dams.

"It will take a few days, after the last RMAF cloud seeding sortie, for final rainfall to occur and for the rainwater to flow into the dams.

"Depending on the outcome and circumstances, PBAPP may also request for additional allocations from the Penang government to fund a second wave of additional cloud seeding operations to replenish the reserves of Penang's dams.

"The primary objective is to induce heavy rainfall over the water catchment areas of the Air Itam Dam and Teluk Bahang Dam. Heavy rainfall is required to refill these dams with as much raw water as possible," he said today.

On April 11, PBAPP had issued a second water alert after two key dams on Penang island have dropped to about 50 per cent levels.

As of yesterday, the effective capacities of the Air Itam Dam and Teluk Bahang Dam were 44.8 per cent and 48.6 per cent respectively.

According to Pathmanathan, the effective capacities of the Air Itam Dam and Teluk Bahang Dam have dropped by 37.7 per cent and 15.4 per cent respectively since Jan 1.

He said this was due primarily to low rainfall (as related to climate change) in water catchment areas and high water demand in the state in 2023.

"The storage level of the Air Itam Dam had diminished by a higher percentage since Jan 1 because its maximum effective capacity is 2,160 million litres (ML) as compared to the Teluk Bahang Dam's maximum effective capacity of 19,240 ML.

"Both dams were not refilled to 100 per cent capacity at the end of last year due to low rainfall in water catchment areas last year," he added.

Pathmanathan said the Penang government and PBAPP looked forward to the success of the cloud seeding operations.

The state government had approved a RM400,000 budget to fund the cloud seeding operations.

On April 13, PBAPP issued a media release requesting for assistance from the Federal Government.

"We want to thank the National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma), RMAF, METMalaysia and Penang Water Regulatory Body (Badan Kawal Selia Air – BKSA) for their timely responses to this urgent matter.

"We are working hand-in-hand to minimise the risks of a potential water crisis in Penang.

"PBAPP hopes that Penang domestic water consumers (households) will also play their roles by using water wisely until the reserves of the Air Itam Dam and Teluk Bahang Dam are replenished to safe levels," he said.

In 2022, about 61.5 per cent of Penang's total water consumption of 868 million litres per day (MLD) was due to domestic water consumption.

In February 2023, total water consumption in Penang spiked further to an average of 944 MLD.