The Star people's paper

Water crunch in Penang

Contingency plan calls for tapping into 'fixed water deposit'

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GEORGE TOWN: Penang now must tap into its "water fixed deposit" – the Mengkuang Dam – as the southwest monsoon brings thunderclouds from the Indian Ocean but empties much of its moisture onto Sumatra before reaching Malaysia.

This led to lower levels of water at Sungai Muda, the main raw water source for Penang and Kedah.

Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) chief executive officer K. Pathmanathan said PBAPP started drawing water from Bukit Mertajam's Mengkuang Dam at an average of 41 million litres a day (MLD) since Saturday because Sungai Muda's level dipped to below 2m.

He said that as of last Friday, the Muda Dam in Kedah was reported to be only 16.6% full.

"Raw water from Mengkuang Dam and Sungai Muda is now channelled to the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (WTP), Penang's largest and most important water treatment plant for 465,000 consumer accounts on mainland Penang, plus in the Northeast and Southwest Districts on the island," he said in a statement yesterday.

Pathmanathan said PBAPP abstracted an average of 1,125.50 MLD of raw water from Sungai Muda last week, compared with 1,196.13 MLD under normal circumstances.

Under normal circumstances, more than 80% of the raw water that PBAPP abstracts daily originates from this river.

Strategic call: PBAPP is currently drawing water from Bukit Mertajam's Mengkuang Dam at an average of 41 million litres a day because Sungai Muda's level has dipped to below 2m. — Photo courtesy of PBAPP

He said the status of Kedah dams that release water into Sungai Muda shows that the effective capacity of the 160-billion-litre Muda Dam (in Kedah) was reported to be at 25.7% on Friday.

He said the reported level of the other dam, Beris Dam, was 82.4% on July 11.

"The maximum effective capacity of the Beris Dam is 120 billion litres.

"Kedah has the option to release more water from Beris Dam to increase the level of Sungai Muda.

"This measure will avoid any major issues at the 14 WTPs in Kedah and the Sungai Dua WTP in Penang," he said.

He said with drawdowns available from Mengkuang Dam, the presently low level at Sungai Muda should not pose an immediate threat to the water supply in Penang.

"We seek the kind understanding and cooperation of all water consumers to use water wisely in Penang because Sungai Muda's level is low and the reserves of Muda Dam have been depleted," he said.