

Reduce water consumption by 10pct, Penangites warned, as levels at dams 'not safe'



GEORGE TOWN: The Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) has appealed to all water consumers in the state to immediately reduce their water consumption by 10 per cent.

PBAPP chief executive officer K. Pathmanathan said the estimated water consumption in Penang hit 927 million litres per day (MLD) yesterday as compared to 877 MLD average in 2023.

"This represents a sudden 50 MLD surge in water consumption year-on-year. (This amount is equivalent) to a volume of water that can fill 20 Olympic-size swimming pools a day or 33,333,333 large (1.5L) bottles of drinking water every day.

"Such a surge in a water-stressed state is not wise or sustainable. It is causing issues in some areas in the Southwest and Seberang Prai Selatan districts, as reported by PBAPP in its FB posting on Saturday," he said today.

As such, Pathmanathan appealed to all water consumers in the state to refrain from using water hoses to water their gardens, clean their vehicles or premises. "Please use water wisely at home and at work," he added.

PBAPP treated water production for the nine water treatment plants (WTPs) is at 1,266.3 MLD (2023 average: 1,198 MLD). Average water loss (NRW) for 2023 was estimated at 26.8 per cent.

Pathmanathan said, in the timeframe from Thursday to yesterday, the river level of Sungai Muda was 1.71m to 1.89m, below the 2.0m "safe level" for water abstraction at the Lahar Tiang Intake in Seberang Prai.

He said the level of the 120 billion litre Muda Dam in Kedah that released water into Sungai Muda reportedly dropped to 48.6 per cent last Friday. "Thankfully, the level of the Beris Dam, the second dam that may release water into Sungai Muda, was reportedly 98.6 per cent on the same day.

"PBAPP is continuing to abstract as much raw water as possible from Sungai Muda daily to meet Penang's water demand. "However, operations to release water from the Muda Dam and Beris Dam into Sungai Muda during dry seasons lie in the hands of Kedah authorities.

"Nevertheless, PBAPP personnel are on stand-by to draw down a maximum of 600 MLD from the Expanded Mengkuang Dam (EMD), as and when we are unable to abstract sufficient water from Sungai Muda," he said.

As of yesterday, the effective capacity of Penang's three key dams are Air Itam Dam (37.3 per cent), Teluk Bahang Dam (73 per cent) and EMD (89.6 per cent). Pathmanathan said the effective capacity of the Air Itam Dam dropped by 0.8 per cent, from 38.1 per cent last Friday to 37.3 per cent yesterday.

PBAPP, he noted, was compelled to draw down more than 11 MLD from the dam. He added that the Air Itam WTP had to produce 25 MLD of treated water to meet increased water demand.

Pathmanathan said since Feb 5, PBAPP's implementation of the Air Itam Dam Action Plan 2024 (AIDAP 2024) had increased the dam's effective capacity by 4.5 per cent, from 32.8 per cent on Feb 5 to 37.3 per cent yesterday.

"One of the key factors that will determine the continuing success of the AIDAP 2024 is moderate consumption of water. PBAPP has been pumping 33 MLD of water from the Sungai Dua WTP into the Air Itam water supply service area to gradually increase the effective capacity of the dam."

"However, if PBAPP is unable to continue pumping 33 MLD of treated water from Seberang Prai to Air Itam due to abnormally high water consumption, the AIDAP 2024 will not work.

"Moreover, there will be more widespread water supply issues in the southwest and Seberang Prai Selatan districts," he pointed out. As such, Pathmanathan urged all water consumers in the state to use less water in Penang during this dry season.

"Our water supply is 'not safe' until rainfall refills our dams and the Muda Dam in Kedah," he said.