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## Penang's water reserves fall as rainfall remains low



GEORGE TOWN: The effective capacities of two dams on Penang island - the Teluk Bahang and Air Itam dams - have dropped significantly in the first quarter of 2025 due to insufficient rainfall in their respective water catchment areas (WCAs).

As of Mar 31, the Teluk Bahang dam's capacity stood at 47.3 per cent, while the Air Itam dam recorded 55.7 per cent. Both had started the year at 61.7 per cent and 76.7 per cent, respectively.

Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) chief executive officer Datuk K. Pathmanathan said the corporation would continue monitoring the dams and tightening daily drawdowns without compromising water supply.

"With support from the Penang government, we will seek assistance from the National Disaster Management Agency (NADMA) and the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) to conduct cloud-seeding operations over the WCAs of the two island dams soon.

"We hope NADMA and RMAF will respond before the Teluk Bahang dam's capacity falls below 40 per cent. Moreover, this is the inter-monsoon period, when there are clouds available for seeding," he said in a statement today.

Pathmanathan stressed the need to cap water consumption to preserve the remaining reserves.

Citing the Teluk Bahang dam, he said the average first-quarter rainfall from 2017 to 2019 was 1,037mm. However, this dropped to 262mm over the next five years (2020–2024) due to El Niño.

This year, PBAPP recorded slightly higher rainfall, but levels remain below pre-2020 figures.

To manage the lower rainfall, PBAPP has capped daily drawdowns from the 18,240-million-litre (ML) dam at 60 million litres per day (MLD) since early 2025.

"This is why the dam's effective capacity has only dropped by 14.4 per cent in the past 90 days, despite low rainfall in its WCA," he said.

For the Air Itam dam, Pathmanathan said its 2,159 ML capacity has declined by about 21 per cent since Jan 1, with just 122mm of rainfall recorded in its WCA - the lowest in eight years.

Meanwhile, the 86,400 ML Expanded Mengkuang Dam (EMD) in Seberang Prai Tengah remained at a strong 92.4 per cent capacity as of the end of March.

The EMD serves as a backup dam, supplying treated water to the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (WTP) only when PBAPP cannot abstract sufficient raw water from Sungai Muda.

As of March 2025, PBAPP continues to abstract adequate raw water from Sungai Muda to support optimal treated water production at Sungai Dua WTP.

However, for seven days in March, the Sungai Muda water level at Penang's Lahar Tiang Intake fell below the 2.0m safe mark. As of Mar 31, the river level was reported at 2.4m.