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THE possibility of more weeks-long bouts of low water pressure is causing stress to residents of an apartment in Air Itam, George Town in Penang.

They have sleepless nights worrying that they will find mere trickles from their taps come dawn.

Fortune Court Residents Association chairperson Khoo Hock Hin said water pressure levels at the apartment had taken a dip twice this year.

He conveyed his fellow residents' worry over this recurring even though the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) had resolved the problem in both instances.

"The first occurrence was during the week before Chinese New Year.

"We struggled for a few days and reached out to PBAPP which got the pressure back to normal," Khoo said when met at a press conference held by Bukit Gelugor MCA vice-chairman Chooi Foo Cheong.

He said the water pressure then dropped again on May 25 and was only normalised on June 6.

"It was hard for all of us as, like me, many residents are elderly and moved in 30 years ago.

"There are five blocks with 317 units in total here.

"It is a five-storey apartment and the first two floors host shoplot units while the remaining three floors consist of home units.

"When the water pressure was low, the higher two floors only got trickles," he said.

Khoo, 77, said many residents from the fourth and fifth floors had to cart heavy pails of water up from the ground floor common area where there was a tap for shared use.

"It was difficult for the elderly to carry

Apartment folk call for end to water woes

Building needs pumps and suction tanks, not public supply issue, says utility firm

the pails to their units.

"Those who were preparing to go to work had to bathe in cold water in the mornings because if they used their heater, the water would be scorching due to the low pressure.

"We have a residents' online group chat in which many highlighted their struggles," he said.

While current water pressure at the apartment was normal, Khoo said residents were worried that low pressure levels would recur.

Fortune Court maintenance manager PJ Robert, from Bandar Baru Air Itam Management Sdn Bhd, said normal water pressure level at the apartment was between 38 and 40 pounds per square inch (psi).

"When the pressure dropped, it was below 30psi.

"That meant water could not reach the higher floors.

"Also, water could not reach the storage tanks on the roof," he noted.

Robert said PBAPP staff had checked on the issue and asked the residents to instal a booster pump, which is a costly solution.

"Prior to the two incidents this year, residents have not had any water pressure-related issues in the past

30 years.

"Furthermore, this issue has not occurred in other neighbouring low-density apartments," he added.

Robert said they could not afford to fork out money for a booster pump.

"We just want PBAPP to maintain water pressure levels so that residents don't face water supply issues," he said.

Chooi, who first highlighted the residents' plight to the media, said PBAPP must maintain the normal water pressure.

"There is no need for residents to spend money on a pump when the water pressure can be maintained by PBAPP.

"Many senior citizens among the residents should not be worried about their water supply as they pay their bills.

"Sudden issues like this stress people out and are unfair to them," Robert added.

PBAPP stated that steps were taken to restore water pressure levels at Fortune Court.

Its chief executive officer Datuk K. Pathmanathan confirmed that low water pressure was recorded from May 25 to June 6.

However, he clarified that the problem had been a localised one.

The corporation, in a media statement, noted that pressure levels in nearby areas were optimal at the time.

"Following on-site checks and a technical review, remedial actions were taken.

"Among factors of the low water pressure incident was a temporary supply adjustment on May 18, during which PBAPP temporarily reduced production at the Air Itam Water Treatment Plant (WTP) from 30 million litres daily (mld) to 25mld.

"To maintain supply continuity, water was re-routed to Fortune Court from the Sungai Dua WTP," he explained.

He added that PBAPP had since increased the water distribution pressure as a proactive step in water pressure management.

Pathmanathan said to support local demand, PBAPP increased distribution pressure to about 30psi, well above the minimum 14psi set by the National Water Services Commission.

"Post-intervention pressure was recorded at 38psi, which is within the optimal range," he added.

The water corporation, however, pointed to the lack of internal infrastructure in Fortune Court.

PBAPP advised the apartment management to instal pumps and roof-top suction tanks in the premises to stabilise internal water pressure levels.

Pathmanathan said the Fortune Court issue was related to its internal plumbing or reticulation systems and was not a public water supply issue.

"The lack of an internal pump at the property contributed to the problem.

"While lower floors (levels 1 and 2) receive direct supply, the upper floors (levels 3 to 5) depend solely on the roof-top tank.

"The building lacks a suction tank and booster pump system, both of which are essential in four- to five-storey buildings in order to maintain continued water supply to the rooftop tank.

"This tank typically refills overnight but empties quickly during peak hours, causing disruptions for upper-floor residents," he detailed.

The water corporation also recommended the services of a certified water infrastructure consultant to design and oversee the necessary upgrades.

Meanwhile, PBAPP said the case was being monitored under its Air Itam Dam Action Plan 2025.

This plan aims to reduce raw water drawdowns from the Air Itam Dam, from the usual 44mld to 11mld during dry weather.

It also involves pumping water from the Sungai Dua WTP to make up for the shortfall in Air Itam Dam drawdowns.

"As part of this ongoing initiative, PBAPP will continue to manage production and drawdowns carefully, ensuring water security while safeguarding dam levels.

"Monitoring will remain active until the end of 2025, or until dam reserves are replenished to full capacity," it stated.

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(Front row, from left) Robert, Khoo and Chooi showing a photo that captured a lower psi reading at Fortune Court. The normal water pressure can be seen on the gauge dial. With them are Fortune Court's assistant operations manager M. Muthusamy (standing left) and Penang MCA Liason committee vice-chairman Wong Chin Chong. — LIM BENG TATT/The Star