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Penang's dams at optimal levels ahead of dry season



GEORGE TOWN: Penang's three major dams have reached optimal water levels for the first time in eight years, ahead of the dry season expected to begin next month.

According to data released by the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP), the effective capacities of the Air Itam Dam, the Teluk Bahang Dam and the Expanded Mengkuang Dam are all above 90 per cent.

PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk K. Pathmanathan said this marked the first time since December 2017 that both the Air Itam and Teluk Bahang dams recorded more than 90 per cent capacity at year's end.

He said the Teluk Bahang Dam stood at 98.9 per cent capacity, the Air Itam Dam at 93.4 per cent and the Expanded Mengkuang Dam at 92.2 per cent.

"The primary reason for the recovery was the high rainfall in dam water catchment areas between September and November, driven by the northeast monsoon and strengthened by a La Niña climate phenomenon," he said yesterday, adding that rainfall had tapered off this month.

Pathmanathan said the secondary factors contributing to the improved dam levels included operational measures implemented by PBAPP.

The Air Itam Dam Action Plan, for example, supported efficient refilling of the dam after its capacity dropped to 49.1 per cent during a dry spell in August.

At Teluk Bahang, strategic refilling was carried out using raw water channelled from the Batu Ferringhi and Sungai Pinang water catchment areas.

The dam had dipped to 45.3 per cent in April following low rainfall.

The Expanded Mengkuang Dam — a pumped water storage scheme upgraded and reopened in 2021 — has maintained generally stable levels throughout the year due to ongoing protocols that prioritise raw water abstraction from Sungai Muda and minimise drawdowns except during emergencies.

Pathmanathan said historically, Penang was now in its strongest water position in eight years heading into a dry season.

"The favourable situation may be tested in the coming months. Weather forecasts indicate that the dry season is likely to begin in the second week of January, with February and March expected to be dry," he added.

In Kedah, the Muda and Beris dams, which release water into Sungai Muda, had reportedly recovered to 97.5 per cent and 99.2 per cent capacity, respectively, up to Dec 18.