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Penangites urged to conserve water as Kedah dam levels drop



GEORGE TOWN: The Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) has activated the Sungai Muda Contingency Plan 2026 (SMCP2026) following a critical drop in the levels of key dams in Kedah that serve as Penang's primary raw water resource.

The decision was prompted by the Muda Dam's capacity plummeting to a concerning 20% as of Friday (Feb 20), a sharp decline from the 84.6% recorded at the start of the year, while the Beris Dam was reported at 78.1% capacity on Feb 16.

PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk K. Pathmanathan said the move is a proactive measure to ensure supply sufficiency for Penang, as these two dams are responsible for releasing water into Sungai Muda during dry seasons.

He said that last year, PBAPP abstracted an average of 1,000 million litres per day (MLD) of raw water from the river to produce roughly 85.5% of the treated water supplied across the state.

"Due to the hot and dry season, as well as aggressive irrigation drawdown activities since Jan 1, the capacity of the Muda Dam has dropped to a critical level," Pathmanathan said in a statement on Monday (Feb 23).

He cautioned that the corporation foresees the dam being unable to release significant volumes of raw water into the Sungai Muda system soon, possibly as early as March.

While the reserves of the Beris Dam are expected to support the needs of both Kedah and Penang until the rainy season forecast in April, Pathmanathan said that the actual timing and volume of rainfall remain uncertain thanks to the impact of climate change.

The contingency plan involves maximising raw water abstraction from Sungai Muda while river levels allow it, and utilising strategic drawdowns from the Expanded Mengkuang Dam (EMD), which currently sits at a healthy 91.5% capacity.

Additionally, PBAPP will continue its Double Dam Defence programme to ensure that the Air Itam and Teluk Bahang dams do not run dry.

Pathmanathan stressed that the plan's success depends heavily on public cooperation, especially with domestic consumption accounting for over half of the state's total water use.

"If Penang consumers can use less water at home, they will play a significant role in ensuring that the state has enough water throughout this year," he said, urging conservation during Chinese New Year and Ramadan.