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Sungai Muda hits danger level, Penang activates contingency plan



Penang has averted a potential water supply disruption after the Sungai Muda river level plunged to a "danger level" of 1.27m at the Lahar Tiang intake yesterday.- PIC CREDIT: FB/japenpenang

GEORGE TOWN: Penang has averted a potential water supply disruption after the Sungai Muda river level plunged to a "danger level" of 1.27m at the Lahar Tiang intake yesterday.

Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) chief executive officer Datuk K. Pathmanathan said the sharp drop was recorded about 4.30pm, well below the safe threshold of 2.0m.

He said the situation forced PBAPP to immediately scale down raw water abstraction from the usual 1,300 million litres per day (MLD) to about 1,000 MLD — a reduction of roughly 30 per cent.

"In response, we activated the Sungai Muda Contingency Plan and released about 300 MLD from the Expanded Mengkuang Dam (EMD) to sustain operations at the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (WTP)," he said today.

The Sungai Dua plant, Penang's largest and most critical facility, produces an average of 1,100 MLD of treated water and supplies about 465,000 consumers across all five districts in the state.

Pathmanathan said the swift activation of the contingency plan had so far prevented supply disruptions in Seberang Perai Utara, Seberang Perai Tengah, Seberang Perai Selatan, as well as the northeast and southwest districts on the island.

He attributed the sudden drop in river levels to upstream irrigation withdrawals in Kedah, adding that PBAPP had not been informed in advance.

As of yesterday, the Beris Dam — which feeds the Sungai Muda system — stood at 49.6 per cent capacity, with a release rate of 864 MLD. At that level, reserves are projected to last about 70 days before reaching the critical 20 per cent threshold.

Meanwhile, the Muda Dam's storage has fallen to 9.5 per cent and is not expected to contribute further releases in the immediate term.

Pathmanathan urged the National Water Services Commission and the Energy and Natural Resources Ministry to urgently intervene in managing the Sungai Muda system.

"The security of water supply for Penang and Kedah must take precedence over irrigation needs under current conditions," he said.

He said that without significant rainfall to replenish dam levels, the situation could deteriorate further, as Sungai Muda remains Penang's sole major raw water source.

"Any sustained inability to abstract sufficient water from the river could trigger a statewide disruption affecting 465,000 consumers, including industrial users and the tourism sector," he said.

While PBAPP will continue maximising abstraction from Sungai Muda and supplementing supply from the EMD, Pathmanathan cautioned that the dam's maximum drawdown capacity was limited to 600 MLD.

"The Sungai Dua plant requires about 1,300 MLD of raw water daily. Our mitigation measures are therefore finite," he said.

He reiterated his call for immediate action to curb upstream irrigation withdrawals until rainfall restores reservoir levels, stressing that safeguarding continuous water supply must remain the top priority.