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Penang water operator diverts supply as Sungai Muda level plunges



GEORGE TOWN: The water level of Sungai Muda has plunged to a “danger level” of 1.27m at the Lahar Tiang intake point on Thursday, forcing a contingency plan by the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP).

To safeguard water supply for consumers, the utility said it activated the Sungai Muda Contingency Plan (SMCP) to immediately draw raw water supply from the Expanded Mengkuang Dam (EMD) to supplement the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant (WTP).

PBAPP chief executive officer Datuk K. Pathmanathan said this allowed the Sungai Dua WTP to continue providing uninterrupted treated water supply to all five districts in Penang, serving about 465,000 consumers.

Pathmanathan said Sungai Muda’s sudden drop also forced the utility to limit raw water abstraction from the river to about 1,000 million litres per day (MLD), down from the normal 1,300MLD.

“From 4.30pm on April 23, abstraction was reduced due to the abnormally low river level,” he said.

“The SMCP activation has so far averted any water supply disruption,” he said.

Under normal conditions, Sungai Dua WTP produces an average of 1,100MLD of treated water for Seberang Perai Utara, Seberang Perai Tengah, Seberang Perai Selatan, Barat Daya and Timur Laut.

Pathmanathan said the likely cause of the sudden drop in Sungai Muda levels was upstream irrigation drawdowns in Kedah, which PBAPP said it was not informed of in advance.

He added that as of Thursday, the Beris Dam stood at 49.6% capacity, releasing about 864MLD into the Sungai Muda system, while the Muda Dam had been depleted to 9.5% and was no longer able to support releases.

At the current release rate, Beris Dam reserves are projected to last about 70 days before reaching critical levels, he said.

PBAPP also cautioned that the Expanded Mengkuang Dam has a maximum drawdown capacity of 600MLD, which limits its ability to fully offset raw water shortfalls if river levels remain low.

In view of the situation, Pathmanathan urged the National Water Services Commission (SPAN) and the Energy Transition and Water Transformation Ministry to intervene urgently in the management of the Sungai Muda system.

“The security of water supply services in Penang and Kedah must be prioritised over irrigation needs under the present circumstances,” he said, adding that sustained rainfall would be required to replenish both the Beris and Muda dams.