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PRESS STATEMENT

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LOGGING IN ULU MUDA: STOP KEDAH FROM ENDANGERING WATER SUPPLY FOR 4.2 MILLION PEOPLE

- **Kedah Menteri Besar's recent video to "explain" trip into Ulu Muda revealed that more than 25,553 hectares (ha.) of 160,000 ha. (16%) of the rainforests in Ulu Muda may be logged.**

PENANG, Monday, 12.10.2020: The Federal Government must stop the Kedah State Government from allowing logging inside the Greater Ulu Muda Forest Complex (Ulu Muda) immediately.

It has been clearly ascertained that any and all logging activities in Ulu Muda endangers water supply in Perlis, Kedah and Penang simply because Ulu Muda is the most important water catchment area in North Malaysia.

To reiterate, logging in Ulu Muda will jeopardise:

- The lives and livelihoods of 4.2 million people living in Perlis, Kedah and Penang;
- All economic activities, including high-tech manufacturing, tourism, retail and services industries in the three states, as well as padi farming; and
- All the planned socioeconomic projects in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER).

A water supply crisis in Perlis, Kedah and Penang will cause unnecessary suffering for the people and potentially incur billions of ringgit in losses for businesses. Three State Governments and the Federal Government will also suffer losses in tax income.

As a reference, the combined GDP contribution of the 3 states was estimated to be RM147.8 billion in 2019.

This is the reason why the former Kedah State Government and Ministry of Water, Land and Natural Resources (KATS) had announced a ban on logging in Ulu Muda in September 2018.

Unfortunately, a 7.10.2020 video posted on a Facebook page entitled “MuhammadSanusiMohdNor” has revealed that logging will re-commence. In that video, the Kedah Menteri Besar tried to justify his recent visit to Ulu Muda.

Complete turnaround from conservation to logging?

YAB Muhammad Sanusi stated, on camera, that logging had been approved for 25,553 ha. of 160,000 ha. of rainforests in Ulu Muda. It means that 16% of the rainforests in Ulu Muda is now “open to logging”.

This is a confusing and disturbing development.

On 26.8.2020, the Kedah Menteri Besar had been quoted in news reports as stating that Kedah is seeking RM100 million in compensation from the Federal Government for conserving Ulu Muda as a regional water catchment area. In fact, on 28.8.2020, Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulau Pinang Sdn Bhd (PBAPP) issued a media release supporting Kedah’s bid to claim RM100 million for conserving 160,000 ha. of rainforests in Ulu Muda.

Less than 2 months have passed. Now, the Kedah Menteri Besar is saying that:

- He wants to extend a buffer zone on the banks of Sungai Muda in Ulu Muda to prevent sedimentation from logging and land development activities to affect river water quality.
- Loggers have re-entered Ulu Muda, and are building roads to bring machines in and transport logs out.
- Logs seized from illegal logging activities should be sold to prevent losses to the Kedah State Government.

Avoid an environmental disaster and water crisis

Please allow me to clarify that “Ulu Muda” is a water catchment area and “Sungai Muda” is a strategic river.

In simple terms, the Ulu Muda rainforests “collect” rainwater that then flows into Sungai Muda. Besides channelling rainwater into the river, the 160,000 ha. of rainforests also naturally “capture and store” water. A percentage of the moisture in rainforests eventually evaporates to form the rainclouds that bring rain. This is a natural hydrological cycle, and it explains why we usually feel hot and humid in rainforests.

Accordingly, if the rainforests are chopped down by loggers, there will be an environmental disaster in Ulu Muda.

The fallouts from this environmental disaster is likely to include a disruption of the natural hydrological system in Ulu Muda; widespread land erosion; uncontrollable water flow and flooding; river water contamination and pollution; as well as heavy river sedimentation and silting that will affect the depth of Sungai Muda.

The impacts will include:

- Less rainfall in Ulu Muda,
- Less raw water flowing into (and from) Sungai Muda,
- Highly compromised river water quality,
- A hotter microclimate in the region that will cause more water losses through evaporation, and
- Ultimately, less raw water availability for Perlis, Kedah and Penang for water supply services.

During the annual January to July dry seasons, Perlis, Kedah and Penang are highly dependent on raw water from the Muda Dam that stores raw water for Sungai Muda. In 2020, we have already seen and experienced the “warning signs” of climate change and its impact on water supply. On 14.4.2020, the effective capacity of the Muda Dam plummeted to only 4.4%.

As such, the priority should be the conservation of Ulu Muda as a NCER water catchment area, if the focus is on the well-being of the people and the NCER economy.

Focus on the “big picture”

It is evident that the Kedah Menteri Besar is now zooming in on maximising profits from logging. He is focusing on the price of wood from dead trees instead of the value of 160,000 ha. of living rainforests in Ulu Muda.

In truth, there should be no need to review the width of the buffer zone along the banks of Sungai Muda if there is no logging in Ulu Muda. It is wrong to believe, or to lead anyone to believe, that Sungai Muda is more important than Ulu Muda; or that the two are separable parts of the most important water supply asset in the NCER.

In theory, the more rainforests you cut down in Ulu Muda, the less water will flow through Sungai Muda because the two are interlinked. It is irrational to think that we can conserve Sungai Muda by damaging Ulu Muda.

Rationality must prevail. The Federal Government must step in immediately to stop the Kedah State Government from destroying a priceless water catchment area.

We must look at the “big picture”: Ulu Muda must be protected and conserved to avoid an unprecedented water crisis that threatens the well-being of three NCER states.

The interests of the people, businesses and the economy must be prioritised and protected, in this age of climate change and the global Covid-19 pandemic.

The ban on logging in Ulu Muda must be reinstated, in full and in perpetuity.

Thank You.

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