

Despite rain, water supply chief says Penang not out of dry weather 'danger zone'

BY OPALYN MOK



Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said the Beris and Muda Dams in Kedah are still at critical levels, while the two Penang dams, Air Itam and Teluk Bahang, still needed to build up their capacities for the end of the year. — Picture by KE Ooi

GEORGE TOWN, May 9 — Penang still remains in the “danger zone” from the prolonged dry spell despite recent rainfall, Penang Water Supply Corporation’s (PBAPP) chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said today.

He said the Beris and Muda Dams in Kedah are still at critical levels, while the two Penang dams, Air Itam and Teluk Bahang, still needed to build up their capacities for the end of the year.

“We need to make sure the dams are full by the end of the year to get ready for the next dry season in January,” he said.

He said the prolonged dry spell due to the El Niño phenomenon had depleted the dams so both states needed to build up storage at dams.

Jaseni revealed that both the Beris and Muda Dams are at 26.4 per cent and 32 per cent capacity respectively, while both Air Itam and Teluk Bahang Dams are above 50 per cent for now.

“We don’t know how long the Muda and Beris Dams will last,” he said.

According to the PBAPP chief, water from the Beris Dam is released to provide water supply for consumers while water from the Muda Dam is for irrigation.

“Kedah, Penang and north Perak is dependent on the Muda River and the river is dependent on the dams when there is no rain,” he said.

He stressed that PBAPP could not release any raw water into the Muda River as it does not have any dams that feed directly to the river, since only the Beris and Muda Dams are able to do so.

Jaseni said they needed to extract 1 billion litres of water per day from the river to supply sufficient water to Penang consumers.

Penang has already stopped water supply for irrigation and reduced the release of water from its dams in efforts to conserve water to last till the dry spell is over.

“Cloud seeding efforts need to be intensified and irrigation needed to be stopped as priority should be given to consumers,” he said, explaining that billions of ringgit will be lost if water supply to consumers is cut off.

As for recent demands by farmers that PBAPP adjust or raise the Sungai Muda Water Scheme Barrage to stop water from overflowing into the sea, Jaseni said it cannot be done without proper engineering studies and extensive engineering works.

He explained that the barrage is not designed to stop or block the flow of water from the river to the sea but to prevent salinity intrusion of sea water into the water abstraction areas along the river.