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GEORGE TOWN (April 15): The federal government must implement large-scale cloud seeding to prevent water shortage in the northern region of the country as the Super El-Nino phenomenon languishes till June, said PBA Holdings Bhd.

Its chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said the authorities cannot wait till the last minute to conduct cloud-seeding that would evidently benefit a four million population as it would not fill the dams in time to cater to the demand.

“We are undergoing the dry season between January and March but this is an unusual drought because it is the Super El Nino phenomenon. Normally, we would expect significant rainfall in April after the dry spell.

“The amount of rainfall in April this year, to date, is significantly less than the historical averages. We are experiencing 60% less rain. We need to ensure water supply lasts till end of June.

“From our projection, our dams can last for another 30 days only. That is why we urge the federal government to act promptly and implement large-scale cloud seeding instead of taking a wait-and-see approach,” he said.

Speaking to reporters at the water source for the Botanic Gardens reservoir, Jaseni, who reiterated Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng’s call for cloud seeding, said the Sungai Muda river which flows from Kedah is supported by the Beris Dam in Sik, Kedah, which stood at 38.3% yesterday.

During the dry seasons, water is released from the Beris Dam to sustain the level on Sungai Muda so that Kedah and Penang can abstract in sufficient quantities to meet dry water demands.

“More than 80% of Penang’s raw water is abstracted from this river daily. According to the current effective capacity, the dam should have enough water for 37 days.

“However, if the waters of Sungai Muda were to drop below the critical level of 1.5 metres, there is no way for Penang and PBAPP to make up for an 80% shortfall in raw water abstraction,” he said.

The effective capacities of Air Itam Dam on April 14 was 59.9% and could last for 59 days while Teluk Bahang Dam was 61.5% or 187 days.

“We are implementing dry weather controls in our distribution systems to minimise the drawdown of Penang’s dams reserves. With these controls, our dam reserves are planned to outlast the Super El Nino season.

“That said, the raw water source for our biggest and most important water treatment plant which is the Sungai Dua Water Treatment in Seberang Perai Utara is Sungai Muda.

“As at April 14, the river level was 2.44 metres and were able to abstract sufficient raw water for treatment at Sungai Dua,” he said.

Jaseni said Beris Dam catered to 15 water supply and seven irrigation intakes in Kedah and Penang with a ratio of 75% supplied for padi planting and at the remainder for domestic and commercial consumption.

Due to the higher usage of water for irrigation, he said the federal government ought to issue an instruction to stop supply for irrigation for the timebeing because domestic and commercial supply would be jeopardised.

“The federal government must make water supply important and sacrifice supply for Irrigation. Of course, in order to that, there should be compensation for padi planters.

“We understand that padi planters in the northern states have delayed their planting in order to give more water to water supply,” he said.

He also urged the Energy, Water and Green Technology Ministry (Kettha) through the National Water Services Commission (SPAN) to ensure that drawdown of water is reduced from the intake to prolong the water storage.

At 12.30pm, 55%-Penang government owned PBA Holdings, which in turn wholly-owns Penang Water Supply Authority Sdn Bhd that operates the water supply sector in the state, rose one sen or 0.89% to RM1.13 with 307,000 shares done for a market capitalisation of RM367.5 million.