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Penang fears 'super drought', calls for drastic actions

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GEORGE TOWN: The nation should temporarily stop irrigating padi fields because the "super drought" is here.

This is one of the four measures that Penang's state-owned water corporation, PBA Holdings Bhd, is calling for.

Its chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa urged the Federal Government to instruct all water authorities nationwide to cease the irrigation of padi fields, especially in the northern region, until the rains return.

Jaseni said Teluk Bahang Dam, for example, received 955mm of rain last April but this month, it only got 91mm of rain so far.

"Air Itam Dam had 200mm of rain last April but we only had 59mm in the last two weeks.

"We are now faced with a super drought," he told reporters during a tour to the waterfall treatment plant in Penang Botanic Gardens.

Citing Muda River in Kedah, Jaseni said its water was too precious now to wet the tens of thousands of hectares of padi fields in Kedah and Penang.

"If we start irrigating for the planting season and run too low on water level later, the padi will just die.

"It is better to delay the plant-ing season and compensate the farmers financially so that they can tide over till it rains again," he said.

He also called on the Federal Government to instruct all water authorities to reduce their draw-down from the country's dams and rivers, launch massive cloud seeding operations and urgently raise the water conservation awareness of Malaysians.

Jaseni's sense of urgency, however, does not seem to be shared by Kedah.

Muda Agricultural Development Authority deputy general manager (technical) Datuk Hor Tek Lip, when contacted, assured that the state's dam levels were still "comfortable and not worrisome".

The authority supervises Pedu, Ahning and Muda dams and provides irrigation for over 50% of the state's padi fields.

"Muda Dam is now releasing water to help Beris Dam regulate Muda River. Normally, we keep Muda Dam's water."