

PRIME NEWS

Pressure mounts on 4 northern states

WATER SCARCITY:

Either farmers or domestic consumers get priority

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A TOUGH decision awaits the authorities in four northern states faced with diminishing water resources because of prolonged drought brought on by the heatwave over the last three months.

They will have to decide whether priority is given to domestic consumers or farmers.

The urgency has increased after water levels at dams and rivers in Perlis, Kedah, Penang and Perak continue to drop.

Penang yesterday sounded the alarm, saying the hot weather was drying up its water resources, which would lead to possible shortages if no solution was found.

"The water crisis won't affect only Penang, but also four million people in the four northern states," said Penang Water Supply Corporation Sdn Bhd (PBAPP) chief executive of-

ficer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa.

"Although it rained on Sunday, we collected only one millilitre at Air Itam Dam and 30 millilitres at Teluk Bahang Dam."

He was speaking after the signing of a Corporate Integrity Pledge between PBAPP and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission here.

He said the most critical factor was the water level at Sungai Muda, Kedah, from which PBAPP extracted more than 80 per cent of Penang's raw water daily.

He said as of yesterday, the reading at the river was 2.73m, which was still above the 2m "alert level".

"Based on PBAPP's calculations, there will be a serious deficit in water supply if Kedah continues to use its water resources for irrigation.

"Muda Dam supplies water to 14 treatment plants and six irrigation intake points for Kedah, two irri-

gation intake points for Penang and one water intake point in Lahar Tiang, of which 75 per cent is used for irrigation and the remaining for drinking water supply."

In **Alor Star**, the supply at Muda Dam, which has been releasing water into Sungai Muda to cater to the needs of consumers in southern Kedah and Butterworth, Penang, is expected to last for 30 days should the heatwave continue.

Muda Agricultural Development Authority (Mada) deputy general manager (technical) Datuk Hor Tek Lip said the dam had been releasing water into the river since April 1 to support the critical Beris Dam.

"It has been 18 days since we (first) released water from Muda Dam into Sungai Muda. Looking at the weather and current water level, it seems that Muda Dam will last only another 30 days.

"The dam will no longer be able to release water into Sungai Muda when it reaches the minimum level of 24 per cent.

"However, there has been no decision made on how long we should continue releasing water from Muda Dam into Sungai Muda."

Muda is among three dams managed by Mada, with the others being Ahning and Pedu. Beris Dam, on the other hand, is managed by the Irrigation and Drainage Department (ID).



Buffaloes cooling off in the mud at Timah Tasoh Dam in Padang Besar, Perlis, yesterday. Pic by Eizairi Shamsudin

Based on information provided by Mada and DID, as of Sunday, the water level at Beris Dam had dropped to 38.99m, while Muda recorded 93.3m or 43 per cent, Pedu (91.53m or 68.9 per cent) and Ahning (106.89m or 75.4 per cent).

In **Padang Besar**, Timah Tasoh Dam remained at a critical level despite rainfall over the past few days, with its water level continuing to drop at an average of 0.02m daily.

As of noon yesterday, the water level at the dam was at 26.12m, compared with 26.15m the day before.

Perlis DID director Abdul Najib Abdullah said the hour-long evening rainfall over the last few days was insufficient.

"We need at least one week of consistent rainfall near the water catchment area to increase the water level."

The critical water level at the dam saw Syarikat Air Perlis imposing water rationing on the northern part of the state since Saturday, affecting 13,000 domestic users.

It was reported that two of 12 locations in five states where cloud seeding was conducted had seen rainfall.

One of them was here, while the

other was in Beris, Kedah.

The other dams — Muda, Pedu and Ahning in Kedah; Air Itam and Teluk Bahang in Penang; Bukit Merah in Perak; Durian Tunggal, Jus and Asahan in Malacca; and Gemencheh in Negri Sembilan — did not see rainfall.

Energy, Green Technology and Water Minister Datuk Seri Dr Maximus Ongkili said water rationing would be implemented only upon the recommendation of state governments.

He said the ministry would study the recommendation before deciding whether to approve the exercise.

"We cannot ration water until the state recommends it.

"We are closely monitoring the situation."

On April 5, he said his ministry, together with the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, had formed a special committee to monitor the water levels at dams nationwide. **Additional reporting by Fernando Fong**

Page 1 pic: Felda Lok Heng settler Nazarudin Md Jamil storing water at his home in Kota Tinggi, Johor, yesterday.