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PRESS RELEASE

PROTECT RIVERS AND WATER CATCHMENT AREAS PROPERLY FOR THE SAKE OF WATER SUPPLY

- **Rainforests that catch rainwater and rivers that deliver the raw water are the beginning of the water supply value chain.**

PENANG, Sunday, 17.11.2019: Rivers and their water catchment areas are Malaysia's primary raw water resources that must be properly protected to ensure continuous good water supply.

PBAPP and PBA Holdings Bhd CEO Dato' Ir. Jaseni Maidinsa said these natural assets represent the beginning of the water supply value chain.

In Malaysia, water catchment areas are usually rainforests that catch rainwater whenever it rains. The raw water then flows into rivers and is transported towards the sea.

"We could spend billions of ringgit to build a new dam today. However, this new dam will not be useful if it cannot be filled with raw water from its water catchment area.

"We may spend millions more ringgit to upgrade a water treatment plant. However, we cannot produce more treated water if there is insufficient raw water to abstract from a river or a dam," he said.

"In other words, water supply for 32.6 million Malaysians and all the businesses that operate in Malaysia are highly dependent on the well-being of our water catchment areas and rivers," he said at the closing of the "*Jom Kenali Sungai Kelian*" river awareness programme in Tanjung Bungah today.

In 2019, Dato' Ir. Jaseni said, the impact of river pollution and contamination in Selangor, Johor and Melaka showed the importance of monitoring and managing rivers properly. "Millions of Malaysians in these 3 states have experienced the negative impact of these river mishaps, in the form of water rationing and supply interruptions," he said.

Dato' Ir. Jaseni noted that in July 2019, there were also news reports about the illegal dumping of electronic waste on a land lot in Kedah, located along the Sungai Muda riverbank.

“The illegal dumping occurred about 20km upstream of PBAPP’s Lahar Tiang Intake. Thankfully, it did not affect the river water,” he said. Sungai Muda is Penang’s primary raw water resource. More than 80% of the raw water that PBAPP abstracts daily comes from Sungai Muda.

Dato' Ir. Jaseni the “river incidents” in 2019 should serve as “wake-up calls”.

“The authorities must enforce existing laws to better protect our rivers. The key agencies responsible are the Department of Irrigation and Drainage (JPS), Department of the Environment (DOE); District Land Offices, and local authorities, such as MBPP and MBSP in Penang. Prevention is better than cure,” he said.

He said PBAPP and other water operators in Malaysia were responsible for managing water supply infrastructure, such as dams, water treatment plants, pumping stations, reservoirs and pipelines.

“However, water operators have no legal jurisdiction to protect and conserve the rivers where the raw water comes from. Such power rests in the hands of the Federal Government, state governments and local authorities,” he said.

Strict laws that protect water catchment areas in Penang

Insofar as the protection and conservation of water catchment areas are concerned, Penang leads the way in Malaysia. Dato' Ir. Jaseni said PBAPP had helped the Penang State Government to enact the following state laws:

1. The Water Supply (Catchment Area) Order 2004, under the Penang Water Supply Enactment 2004, identifies 11 key water catchment areas in Penang and totally protects 62.9 sq. km of forestlands from destructive commercial exploitation and pollution.

2. Water Supply (Catchment Area) Order 2009 specifies that only the following activities may be undertaken, downstream of the raw water intakes in Penang's water catchment areas:
- a. Camping, picnics, hiking, hill and jungle trekking, canoeing and non-motorised boating, bird watching, orienteering and forest hunts, and fishing or angling competitions.
 - b. Establishment of herbariums, botanical farms, butterfly farms, mini-zoos, aviary parks or bird watching centres, arboretums, camping sites, lake gardens and/or other passive eco-tourism development projects.

Dato' Ir. Jaseni said a total of 62.9 sq. km of forestlands in Penang were permanently protected by these state legislations as water catchment areas.

"Please note that Penang's Order 2004 and Order 2009 are more stringent than the National Forestry Act 1984 (NFA 1984). Other states have gazetted forests as permanent reserve forests (PRFs) under the NFA. However, Section 10(1)(a) of the NFA allows for the classification of a PRF as a timber production forest under sustained yield," he said.

"In Penang, there is no such thing as a timber production forest under sustained yield. Our state laws totally ban all destructive activities, including logging, in water catchment areas," he added.

Measures needed to protect Ulu Muda as a NCER water catchment area

Dato' Ir. Jaseni said Penang and PBAPP were still asking the Federal Government to work with Kedah to conserve 163,000 hectares of rainforests in Ulu Muda, totally and in perpetuity.

Located in Kedah, Ulu Muda is the most important water catchment area in the Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER). About 70% of Perlis' raw water, 96% of Kedah's raw water and more than 80% of Penang's raw water comes from Ulu Muda.

On 4.11.2019, Penang Chief Minister and Tanjong MP YAB Tuan Chow Kon Yeow asked in Parliament if Ulu Muda had been fully gazetted, in view of its importance to water supply in the NCER.

In its reply on the same day, the Ministry of Water, Land and Natural Resources (KATS) stated that the Kedah State Government had gazetted 106,418 hectares (ha) of the Ulu Muda forests as “permanent reserve forests”, or PRFs, since 24.9.1932.

KATS also stated that on 10.5.2018, the Kedah State Forestry Department classified 16,299 ha of the PRFs (15.3% of 106,418 ha) as “water catchment forests” and 11,118 hectares (10.4% of 106,418 ha) as “state forest parks”.

Dato’ Ir. Jaseni said 4.11.2019 parliamentary answer left open the possibility of future logging in Ulu Muda.

“Kedah had reportedly gazetted Ulu Muda forests as PRFs since 1932. However, this gazette did not stop logging in Ulu Muda until 2018,” he said.

On 4.9.2018, he said, KATS publicly thanked the Kedah State Government for banning logging in Ulu Muda. However, on 21.4.2019, *The Star* published an exposé showing that 700 ha of rainforests had been logged at Bukit Keramat, revealing a bare hill near the Ahning Dam.

“Evidently, gazetted forests as PRFs under the NFA 1984 does not protect water catchment areas from logging, unless these areas are specifically classified as water catchment forests.

“Make no mistake: Any form of logging in Ulu Muda threatens water supply for about 4.2 million people in the 3 NCER states of Perlis, Kedah and Penang. This is an important socioeconomic issue in the NCER that must be resolved decisively and conclusively.

“To ensure the well-being of the people and the success of the NCER, the Federal Government must compensate Kedah to conserve Ulu Muda; and work with Kedah to ensure that Ulu Muda is totally protected as a NCER water catchment area,” he said.

Issued by : Puan Syarifah Nasywa bt Syed Feisal Barakbah
Corporate Communications Unit
Tel : 04-200 6607
Email : syarifah@pba.com.my