

No rain, be ready for pain if you let water go down the drain, Penangites warned

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Penang Water Supply Corporation CEO Jaseni Maidinsa (left, gesturing) wants Penangites to stop washing cars and watering gardens unnecessarily to conserve water.

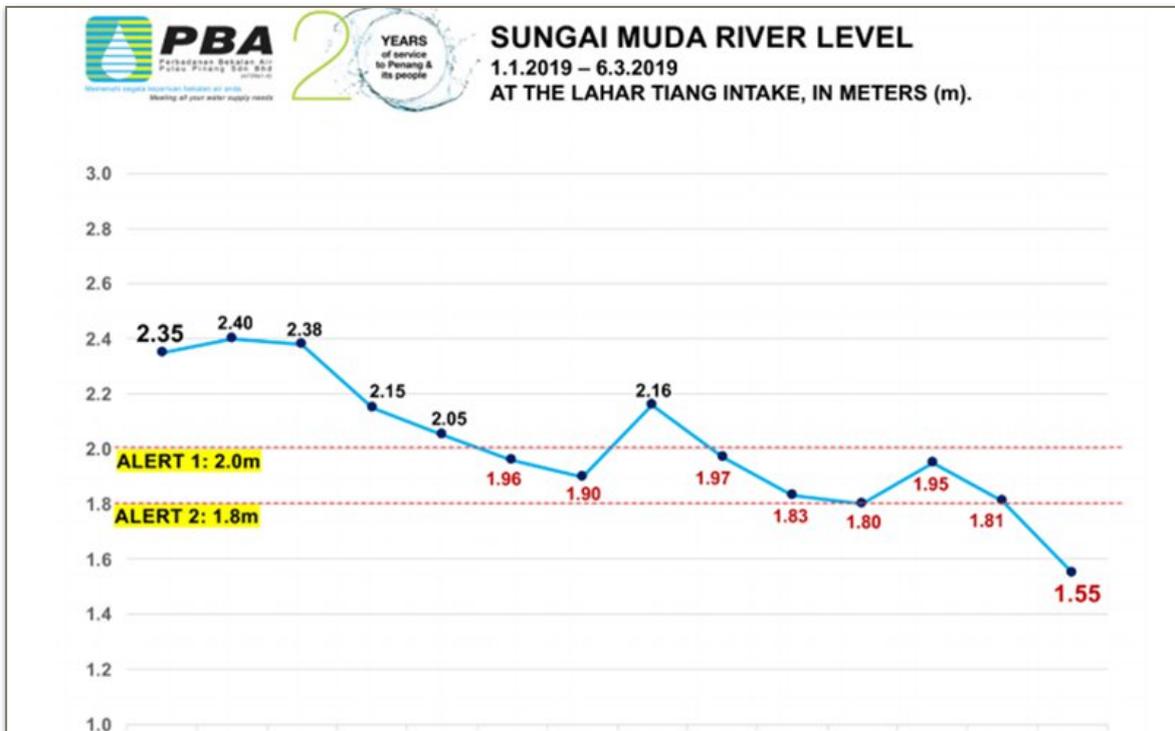
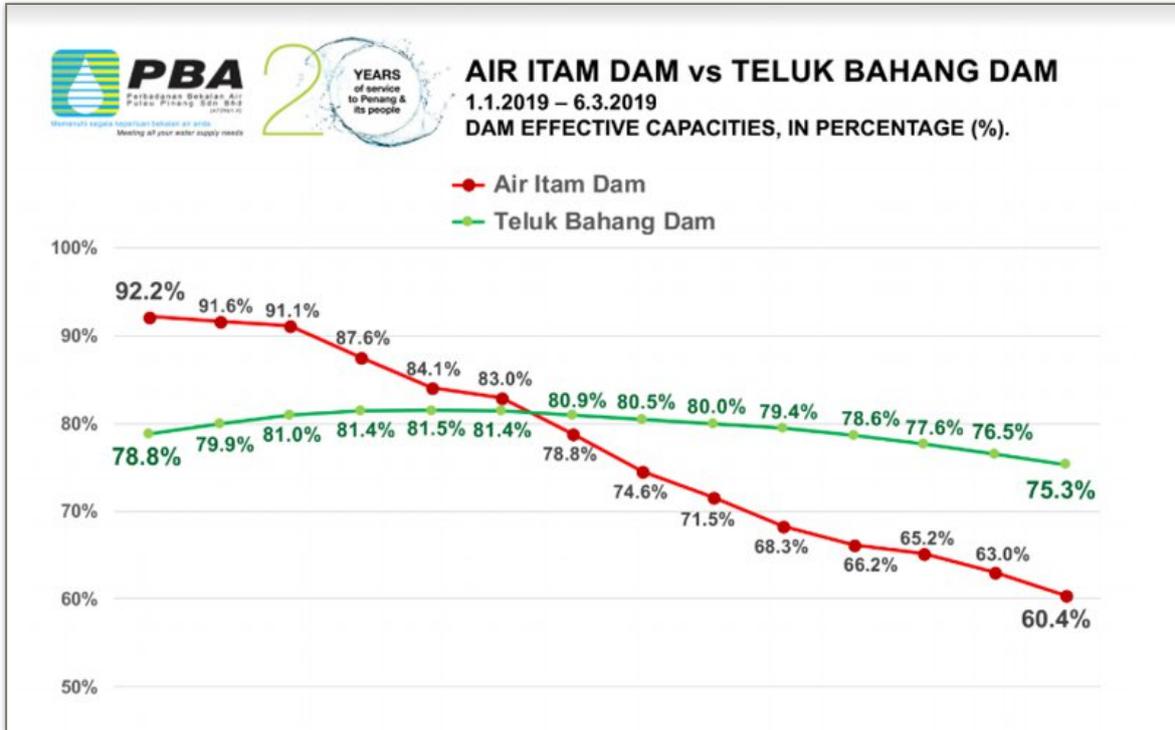
GEORGE TOWN: As Penang crosses into a third week without any rain in sight, the state water utility company is urging residents to use water wisely, as water levels from a major river have started to dwindle.

Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBA) CEO Jaseni Maidinsa said water in Sungai Muda, the river that supplies water to 80% of the state, had reduced significantly.

He said the river's level dropped 34% from 2.35m on Jan 1 to 1.55m yesterday.

Jaseni said in view of this, Kedah authorities had released more water from their Muda and Beris dams to meet Kedah's demands, including for irrigation of crops. The Muda's headwaters start eastward in Kedah, with Penang drawing water from its borders in the west.

He said usually the dams would pump out 432 million litres per day (MLD) or five cubic metres per second (cumecs). Today, the levels were jacked up to 864 MLD, or 10 cumecs, to meet the river's shortfall, he said.



Comparatively, the average water demand for Penang was 826 MLD in 2017.

Jaseni revealed that the Air Itam dam, whose waters were previously reported as also going down, had another 59 days before it dried up completely.

The dam's effective capacity is now 60.4% as of yesterday, compared with 92.2% on Jan 1. It serves over 170,000 people in Air Itam, Paya Terubong and the surrounding areas of Jalan Masjid Negeri (Green Lane).

Jaseni said while the state's water situation was not critical, it was best for all to start reducing water use, as the weather patterns appeared similar to the "Super El Nino" phenomenon experienced in 2016.

He said between January and July in 2016, there was barely any rain, which resulted in water levels at dams dropping.

Jaseni said if there was still no rain by the end of the month, PBA would activate measures to conserve water, which it calls "dry weather control measures".

He said one of the measures was to divert water from other sources to the Air Itam area to meet demand. The dam's raw water drawdowns will be cut significantly, too.

Jaseni said water treatment plants would double their production of treated water to counter the shortage of water.

He said when all else failed, a contingency plan would be activated, where the Mengkuang Dam in Bukit Mertajam would be used to release water. Padi planting will then be requested to be delayed.

Jaseni said the Mengkuang Dam was a "strategic dam" which had a 46% effective capacity and was 26 times larger than the dam in Air Itam. The dam is only used during emergencies

"The people of Penang must play their role to minimise the risk of water rationing by reducing their daily water consumption.

"Please do not unnecessarily wash your car or motorcycle, water your garden, clean your house or cool down your house compound."

The last rainfall recorded in Penang was on Feb 20. PBA has four dams in total, with two on the island – Teluk Bahang and Air Itam – and two on the mainland – Mengkuang and Bukit Panchor in Nibong Tebal.

Penang uses the most water in the country at 277 litres/capita/day (l/c/d) in 2017, compared with the national average of 201 l/c/d the same year. Comparatively, Singapore recorded 143 l/c/d in 2017. The United Nations' recommendation is 148 l/c/d.