

PRIME NEWS

'4 steps to avoid water crisis'

URGENT: Northern states may face water rationing if no action taken

AUDREY DERMAWAN
GEORGE TOWN
news@nst.com.my

THE Federal Government has been told to implement four urgent measures to avert a possible damaging scenario in the northern region in light of the El Nino season.

The four measures are:

- instructing all water agencies in the country to reduce the drawdown from their storage;
- instructing all states to delay water supply for irrigation purposes and prioritise water supply for consumers;



- large scale cloud seeding operations; and,
- sending loud and clear message that consumers should use water wisely.

Penang Water Supply Corporation Sdn Bhd (PBAPP) chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said by adopting these measures, the government could avoid the need for water rationing.

"The Federal Government must

act promptly.

"Failure to do so will result in the northern states facing a major water crisis," he said during a visit to the Penang waterfall on the hills off PBAPP's water filter plant in Botanical Gardens here yesterday.

Jaseni also urged the federal and Kedah authorities to come clean on the effective capacity of the Beris Dam and Sungai Muda in the rice bowl state.

During the dry season, water is released from the dam to sustain the Sungai Muda level so that Kedah and Penang can extract water in sufficient quantities to meet demand.

More than 80 per cent of Penang's raw water is extracted from this river daily.

"The effective capacity of the dam is 38.3 per cent as of Thursday while the water level at Sungai Muda is at 2.44m.

"We are not able to get the official readings for both as they are not available on the relevant websites.

"According to the current effective capacity, the dam should have enough water for 37 days.

"This means that there should be sufficient water for Kedah and Penang to extract until the third week of May," he said, when sounding the alarm.

The Meteorological Department said that the El Nino phenomenon would last until June.

Jaseni said by reducing the drawdown from the storage, this would ensure continuous water supply although water pressure would be reduced.

"We have been implementing the dry weather controls in our distribution systems to minimise the drawdown of the state's dam reserves.

"We have been doing it since Jan-

uary. With these controls, our dam reserves will outlast the El Nino season," he said.

Jaseni also added that the Federal Government should prioritise consumers first and delay water supply for irrigation purposes.

Padi planting can be delayed.

"For now, about 75 per cent of our water supply is for irrigation, leaving 25 per cent for consumers.

"This priority needs to change in view of the prolonged dry spell."

Jaseni said normally there would be significant rainfall in April, after the January to March dry spell.

The amount of rainfall in April, to date, is significantly less than the historical averages.

Jaseni said the Penang dams had enough water to last until June.

As of Thursday, the effective capacity of the Air Itam Dam is 59.9 per cent which can last for 59 days while the effective capacity of the Teluk Bahang Dam is 61.5 per cent which can last for 187 days.



Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa