

WATER SHORTAGE

USE DESALINATED WATER, PENANG TOLD

This could meet the needs of state's industrial sector, says Mada chairman

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IT is time for Penang to find ways to treat seawater, as practised by Singapore, to at least meet the water demand of the state's industrial sector.

Muda Agricultural Development Authority (Mada) chairman Datuk Othman Aziz said desalinated water

should be considered a possible long-term solution to address concerns regarding raw water supply in Penang during a dry spell.

Othman said Penang might dedicate raw water sourced from Sungai Muda, which flows from Kedah, for its domestic consumption in future.

He said water storage at the Muda Dam was recorded at 56 per cent on Wednesday, which was more than enough for domestic and industrial consumption in southern Kedah and Penang for several months.

However, he said, the dam's storage had to reach at least 65 per cent to cater to irrigation needs of padi farming areas in Perlis and Kedah's Mada region.

He said the low water level at the Muda Dam was due to a huge

amount of water being released into Sungai Muda last year in southern Kedah and Penang during the prolonged dry season.

"The rainfall pattern has changed and the amount of rain at water catchment areas has dropped.

"This could be the result of logging activities that were carried out a few years ago, and we can see its effects on the environment now.

"It has a domino effect in the long-run. For example, the reduction of water supply will affect the padi yield and in turn, cause losses to padi farmers."

As part of the preparation for the dry season this year, Othman said Mada had taken measures, including introducing dry seeding technique in Kedah and Perlis for the next padi

planting season, which starts in March.

He said the method, which had been implemented in 1993 due to limited water sources, would save about 300,000 cubic metres of water.

"Campaigns on dry seeding technique have started and farmers have been briefed about this. However, we must be prepared for lower padi yield from this method."

State Water Resources and Supply Committee chairman Datuk Badrul Hisham Hashim said the state government would find the best solution to ensure the water supply from all dams in Kedah, including the Muda Dam, was sufficient until the end of a dry spell.

He said a meeting with agencies such as Mada and the Meteorology

Department would be held next month to discuss contingency plans such as cloud seeding, should the El Nino phenomenon recur this year.

"We need federal assistance to conduct cloud seeding. We will look into the best measures to avoid a water crisis during dry season."

The Penang Water Supply Corporation yesterday expressed its concern over the status of the Beris and Muda dams in Kedah as more than 80 per cent of Penang's raw water was extracted from Sungai Muda daily.

Its chief executive officer, Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa, was quoted as saying that preventive action must be initiated immediately and cloud-seeding efforts should be intensified to maximise capacities of the Beris and Muda dams.