

Penang water authority says dam reserves at record low, urges conservation

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GEORGE TOWN, Jan 15 — Water reserves at Penang's two main dams are at an all-time low and people in the state are advised to reduce unnecessary usage.

Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP) chief executive officer Datuk Jaseni Maidinsa said today that the effective capacities in Air Itam Dam and Teluk Bahang Dam were at 62 per cent and 39.5 per cent respectively.

"This was the lowest level compared to the same period since 2017," he said in a press conference with Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow.

The northern island state is home to many multinational manufacturing companies and its capital city George Town is a popular Unesco heritage site.

Jaseni said the state expected rainfall from September to December to fill its dams like in previous years but noted that last year's volume was the lowest in the state's history — Air Itam was 44 per cent lower, while Teluk Bahang was 55 per cent lower.

In 2017, the Teluk Bahang Dam recorded 100 per cent effective capacity while the Air Itam Dam recorded 99.4 per cent on January 14.

The levels progressively deteriorated over the years to around 98.6 per cent for Teluk Bahang Dam and 97.5 per cent for Air Itam Dam in 2018 and 81.4 per cent and 88.7 per cent respectively in 2019.

"The primary cause is abnormally low rainfall in the past four months due to climate change," Jaseni said. He said the total rainfall recorded in Air Itam Dam between September and December 2019 was 702mm, which is equivalent to 44.5 per cent of the three-year average of 1,577mm, recorded for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

The total rainfall recorded in Teluk Bahang Dam between September and December 2019 was 1,732mm, which is equivalent to 55.9 per cent of the three-year average of 3,101mm recorded for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

"We have several alert levels so when the dams reach a critical level of below 30 per cent, we will request cloud seeding at Teluk Bahang and Air Itam," Jaseni said.

He said for now, PBAPP is working hard to make sure the water reserves in the dams will last until April and May when rainfall is expected.

He said PBAPP has been minimising raw water drawdowns from the Air Itam Dam and Teluk Bahang Dam.

"To meet water demand during the 2019 year-end festive period, we have optimised the production of treated water in the Sungai Dua Water Treatment Plant on the mainland and pumped more treated water to the island," he said.

He advised the public to avoid using hoses to wash their vehicles and clean their homes.

"Use the broom and mop to clean your homes and use a bucket and sponge to wash your vehicles to conserve water," he said. He said PBAPP will do its best to avoid water rationing and consumers will need to chip in by saving water.

Chow said the state is keeping a close watch on the dam water levels. "We receive daily reports on the dam water levels and from the statistics, it is clear that climate change has left a huge impact on our water supply," he said.