

Now drought threat looms

Hot, dry spell to get worse next month when El Nino phenomenon hits

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysians have barely recovered from the recent floods and the authorities are now warning the people to brace themselves for a possible drought.

With the expected prolonged hot and dry weather, the country is also on high alert for peat and bush fire, with Muadzam and Tebu Hitam in Pahang, and Batang Berjuntai in Selangor, identified as potential hot spots.

The hot spell that is synonymous with the Chinese New Year period is merely a precursor to an even longer hot and dry spell due next month when the El Nino phenomenon hits Malaysia.

This is because the monsoon that lashes the country during the early part of every year will then reach Indonesia, leaving less moisture here, said Meteorological Services Department director-general Dr Yap Kok Seng.

Syarikat Bekalan Air Selangor (Syabas), the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID), and the Department of Environment (DOE) have also warned the public to start conserving water.

DID director-general Datuk Keizrul Abdullah said the country's dams had enough water to last three months should there be no rain at all.

"This in itself is quite good if we have to face such a situation where there is no inflow from the rivers for

three months.

"Even if we are looking at a drought, and if we were in the middle of one, there will be ground water to provide some inflow," he said yesterday.

Keizrul said the extreme drought in 1997 had always been used as a benchmark.

"Going by that experience, it was a matter of people reacting only when the situation was really bad. People were not saving water then (during the drought)," he said.

This time, instead of waiting for the dams to run out of water, conservation measures would be put in place much earlier, he said.

Selangor DOE director Che Asmah Ibrahim said the department had started surveillance for those who

carried out open burning.

Syabas officials said that the public could now start to save rainwater and use pails when washing the car or watering plants instead of the hose.

Meanwhile, the state co-owners of Klang Valley's main water supplier have met with the Government to discuss exploring alternative sources of the precious commodity in an attempt to avert the possibility of a water crisis in case of drought, **SIM LEOI LEOI** reports.

Energy, Water and Communications Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said in Putrajaya that it was decided that there were good prospects for scouting for underground water.

"This will help mitigate any dry

season that may hit the Klang Valley in the months to come.

"My ministry is aware of the warning for drought. But at present, there is enough water and enough storage capacity," he said.

Syabas, apart from monitoring the water level of dams, has allocated 485 static tanks and 65 tankers in case taps run dry, *Bernama* reports.

Chief executive officer Ruslan Hassan said Syabas had even collaborated with the Selangor government to identify several lakes in the Klang Valley where water could be used during an extended dry spell.

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