

DID ready to face drought

Dept draws up contingency plan

KUALA LUMPUR: The Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) is preparing to revise its schedule of water supply for agriculture, including shifting the planting season, in case drought hits the country in July.

DID director-general Datuk Keizrul Abdullah said the department had drawn up a contingency plan to face the effects of global weather change.

"The initial indication we received last year was that the country would face quite a bad El Nino effect but subsequent indications are that it would not be as bad as expected, with the worst of the impact to be felt from July to October.

"During that time, we might experience a drought," he told reporters at the department's 75th anniversary celebrations yesterday.

Keizrul said padi was the main crop that required irrigation, and the second planting season would also begin in July.

He said 70% of the country's water was used for irrigation purposes. As such, shifting the planting season by two weeks to a month might be a necessary step to conserve water.

"This was done in 1998 when we had a drought. The worst was in the late 70s when one planting season could not be carried out due to drought," he said.

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KEIZRUL ABDULLAH

The northern state of Kedah has not had rain for almost a month and other states in the north can expect a dry period starting this month.

"We are working with the Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry and the Natural Resources and Environment ministries, as it involves them as well," he said.

Keizrul said the present water level at the dams was high, a good sign that the country would face the start of the drought with full dams.

"We just faced major floods but in no way does this mean we need not conserve water," he said.

"We need to prepare ourselves, not worsen the situation. If we start conserving now we can sustain our water needs until the end of the year."