



An aerial view of the **partially dried-up Bukit Merah Lake in Perak** yesterday. Pic by Supian Ahmad

# On verge of disaster

**'THE WORST':**  
Kerian may be declared disaster zone if dam's water level drops to 5.1m

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**K**ERIAN district may be declared a disaster zone if the water level at the Bukit Merah Dam drops to 5.1m, which will see about 250,000 people facing water rationing.

State Public Utilities, Infrastructure, Energy and Water Committee chairman Datuk Zainol Fadzi Paharudin said if the dry condition continued, it would take another 23 days for the water level at the man-made lake to reach a critical level.

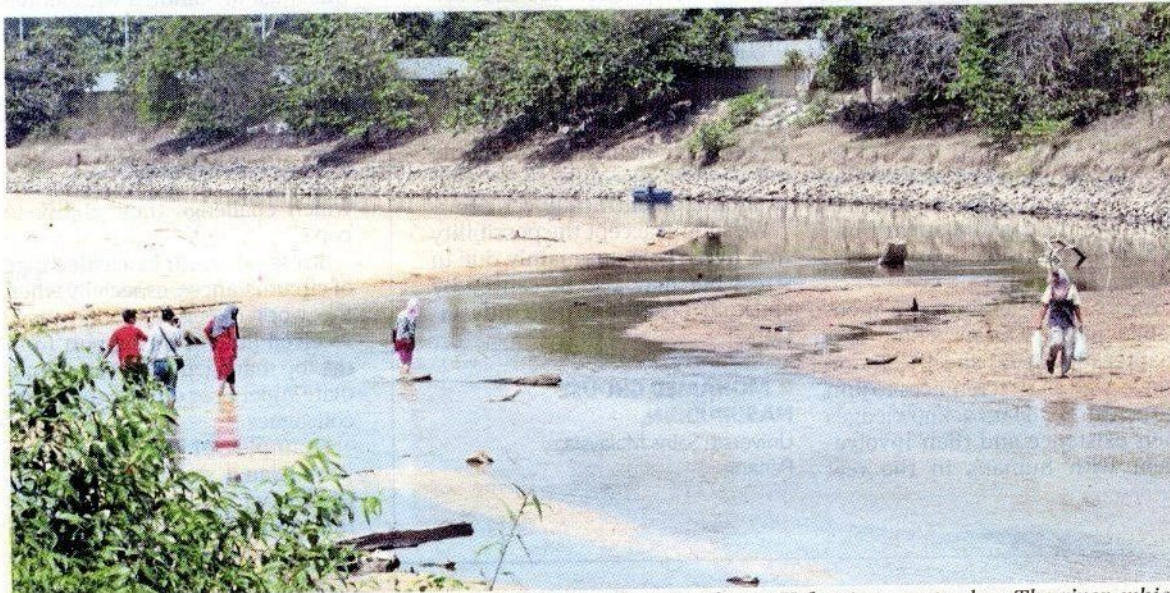
"The dam's water level reached 5.97m today (Monday). This is very alarming since it is the worst in history," he said after visiting the lake here yesterday.

Although the authorities have been conducting cloud seeding since April 12, they had failed to produce rain due to a lack of suitable clouds.

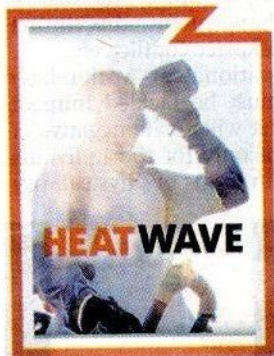
"We have stopped releasing water from the dam for agricultural activities. The focus now is on domestic use.

"The reservoir is supplying 120 million litres of water daily to two treatment plants in Gunung Semangol, which is lower than the 150 million litres daily that it used to supply."

Zainol said the state government planned to deepen the dam at Bukit Merah Lake from 8.55m to 9.9m, with a cost of RM200 million, to ensure that it would have sufficient



People no longer use boats to cross **Sungai Golok in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan**, yesterday. The river, which has dried up, is the major border crossing between the east coast of Malaysia and Thailand. Pic by Zaman Huri Isa



water supply in the future.

On Sunday, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abd Kadir said the state government might request the Federal Government to declare Bukit Merah a disaster zone if the dam's water level dropped further.

If Bukit Merah was declared a disaster zone, he said, the National Security Council would help farmers, especially in Kerian.

"If it (a state of emergency) is declared, it does not mean that the area is closed. The government will make

an assessment in terms of losses and others, especially for farmers," he said after attending the state-level Vaisakhi open house celebrations.

Zambry urged the authorities, including the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry, to view the situation in the area as critical since it involved 5,000ha of padi fields.

"It is not just about the lake. It also involves farmers in the area. This will affect Perak and the country."

Bukit Merah Laketown Resort assistant director of sales and marketing Aslina Ahmad said she hoped the authorities would not declare the area a disaster zone as it would affect tourism.

"We are already affected by the heatwave as the number of visitors has dropped 50 per cent."

Although the Bukit Merah Orang Utan Island was closed for more than two weeks after it was no longer accessible by boats, the resort and its water theme and eco-adventure parks were open as usual,

she said.

"The only activities that stopped are the ones at the lake," she said.

Bukit Merah Orang Utan Island Foundation chief executive officer Dr D. Sabapathy said its revenue was affected after it had stopped taking visitors to the island.

"This is the worst low water level I have ever seen. The first one was two years ago but it lasted for only a week."

He said his staff had to use canoes to send food to the 24 orang utans on the island.

"I have no intention of moving the orang utans to another place because it is not an easy task.

"I am hoping for heavy rain. Cloud seeding is not helping because the rain is not as much as expected."

**Page 1 pic:** An aerial view of **dried-up Bukit Merah Lake in Perak** yesterday. The **Bukit Merah Dam's water level has dropped to an alarming level** because of the heatwave. Pic by Supian Ahmad