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Working group to tackle El Nino

HOT AND DRY

SPELL: Agency issues guidelines to ease people's problems

FAZLEENA AZIZ
PUTRAJAYA
news@nst.com.my

THE National Disaster Management Agency (Nadma) has activated a working group to tackle the warm and dry spell following the El Nino phenomenon that has hit the country.

Nadma director-general Datuk Zaitun Ab Samah said the group would meet periodically to monitor, coordinate and carry out actions to mitigate the situation.

She said the group consisted of members from the state- and district-level disaster management committee, which was headed by the state secretary and district officer.

"Those at the state level are required to inform the committee of locations that face chronic water supply shortages during the warm and dry season.

"This is to enable early preparation to ease the problems faced by the people.

"The implications of El Nino, which brings with it increased temperatures, can affect water levels at dams, cause contamination and increase the possibility of forest fires.

"Since we are aware of this phenomenon, we cannot be complacent. Proactive steps are needed," she said, adding that the high-risk states included Perlis, Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Malacca, Sabah and Sarawak.

Zaitun was speaking after chair-



National Disaster Management Agency director-general **Datuk Zaitun Ab Samah** chairing the working group to tackle the El Nino phenomenon in Putrajaya yesterday. **Bernamea pic**

ing a high-level committee meeting to tackle the warm and dry spell here yesterday.

She said those living in the mentioned states should conserve drinking water, use water sparingly and not carry out open air burning, especially when the weather was dry.

She said the committee would keep track of water levels in dams nationwide to ensure there was enough water supply.

Zaitun said the Department of Irrigation and Drainage had put up a website that displayed information on drought (infokemarau.water.gov.my), showing river flow, rainfall and water levels, a list of storage dams and the standard precipitation index.

She said the Fire and Rescue Department, Rela, Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, Malaysian Civil Defence Department and Special Malaysian Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team would work together to prevent forest and cross-border fires, as well as open burnings.

She said other measures includ-

ed cloud seeding operations by the **Meteorological Department**, an action plan to prevent open burning by the Department of Environment, as well as the monitoring of open burnings in landfills by local councils.

National Water Services Commission chairman Datuk Ismail Kasim said they had yet to receive reports on the scarcity of water because of the hot weather, but urged water operators to monitor their resources.

Based on predictions by the Meteorological Department, El Nino is expected to exceed the 1997/1998 period, with indicators predicting an from between 0.5°C to 2.0°C nationwide, thus, affecting the volume of rainfall.

El Nino is expected to reach its peak this month, carrying forward into next month and March. In April, conventional rain is expected, with a change in the monsoon winds.

In Malaysia, the phenomenon is expected to reduce rainfall intensity by 20 to 60 per cent starting this month.

Working group to manage hot and dry situation

By JOSEPH KAOS Jr
joekaosjr@thestar.com.my

PUTRAJAYA: With Malaysia bracing for spells of hot and dry weather due to the El Nino phenomenon, the National Disaster Management Agency has set up a dedicated working group to manage the situation.

The agency's director-general Datuk Zaitun Ab Samad said the working group would meet periodically to monitor the hot and dry situation and coordinate immediate action.

"The hot and dry spell caused by El Nino is expected to hit us in the first quarter of the year.

"Its impact could potentially lead to low water dam levels, forest fires and haze.

"With that, our agency has activated a working group that will be dedicated to tackle this hot and dry season.

"The group will be made up of members of the state and district-level disaster management committees, which are led by the state secretaries and district officers," said Zaitun at a press conference here after chairing a

high-level committee meeting at the Prime Minister's Department here yesterday.

She said the high-level meeting had discussed several things including banning open burning during the dry season, if required.

"We have also informed the respective state governments to identify locations that are expected to face water supply shortage early, so that it could prepare ahead of time before things become worse," said Zaitun.

Malaysian Meteorological Department director-general Datuk Che Gayah Ismail, who was also at the press conference, said the El Nino phenomenon was predicted to hit its peak this month.

"The last time the country faced an El Nino phenomenon of this high intensity was in 1997 and 1998, where temperatures reached 40.1°C.

"The phenomenon will gradually weaken from February to June, when conditions will be back to normal.

"But the impact of El Nino, such as dry spells, forest fires and haze would be felt until April in Malaysia," she said.

