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'Hot weather stressing out our chickens'

SUPPLY HIT: Their growth hampered, egg production down by 10 per cent, says minister

KUALA LUMPUR

IF you think you're stressed out by the searing hot weather, spare a thought then for the chickens.

According to Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek, it is not only humans who were feeling the effects of the El Nino weather phenomenon, Bernama reported.

Chickens, he said, were under "stress", directly hampering their growth process.

"This can happen as some poultry farmers still use outdated concepts such as open coops. When temperatures soar, the chickens' stress level can increase.

"For example, it can take them 40 days instead of 38 days to attain a certain weight," he said during a question-and-answer session in the Dewan Negara yesterday.

Shabery was responding to a question from Senator Engku Naimah Engku Taib who asked



whether the hot weather would affect the supply of chicken and beef, especially with the coming month of Ramadan.

He said the hot weather would lead to a five to 10 per cent reduction in chicken egg production.

"We are worried that the *rakyat* will become distressed when the supply of chicken goes down."

To solve the problem, he said poultry farmers must adopt new techniques, such as temperature-controlled closed coops.

"For the fasting month, we have made necessary preparations. If the supply is not sufficient, the ministry is prepared to import chickens to ensure that the prices are stable."

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Wilfred Madius Tangau was reported as saying that the El Nino weather phenomenon would end in June.

A laketown with no lake

El Nino taking a toll on Bukit Merah despite cloud seeding

By CHRISTOPHER TAN
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KERIAN: El Nino has claimed a 4,000ha dam here, which is also part of the tourist spot – the Bukit Merah Laketown Resort – even as planes continue to seed clouds to battle the drought in the northern region.

The Bukit Merah Dam has less than 6m of water at its deepest point and only has 14% left despite having a catchment area of 480 sq km.

More than two-thirds of what was once the lake's surface is now a desolate landscape of once-sunken tree stumps.

"It has been raining most evenings and nights recently from cloud seeding, but it did little to raise the dam level.

"The lake had lost too much water," said state Energy and Water Committee chairman Datuk Zainol Fadzi Paharudin yesterday.

Rain gauges on Wednesday night, he added, showed only a gain of 2mm.

Since April 11, the Royal Malaysian Air Force and Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry had sent planes laden with fine salt to stimulate clouds over dams in Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak, Malacca and Negri Sembilan.

Meanwhile, padi farmers are incurring massive losses because what water was left can no longer reach the dam's release gates to irrigate their fields.

They are now appealing for financial subsistence from the Federal Government through Perak Farmers Organisation chairman Datuk Seri Dr Raja Ahmad Zainuddin Raja Omar, who said that they had lost at least RM8mil because of the stalled planting season.

Hundreds of arowana fish ponds, visible along the North-South Highway beside Bukit Merah Lake, are now holding their fish stocks worth hundreds of thousands of ringgit per farm in stagnant pools because they hardly have water to refresh their ponds.

Also suffering is Bukit Merah Laketown Resort. Though it is still operating, most of the lake activities have stopped.

Boatman Mohd Yusof Shamsuri, 58, said the Bukit Merah Orang Utan Island had been closed for two weeks.



Dam-pened spirits: An aerial view of the dried up lake in Bukit Merah Laketown Resort in Kerian. — Drone photography by Se Vena Networks

"Our passenger boats are just sitting on the lake's bed at the end of the jetty," he said.

Sungai Kurau, which pours into the lake from the west and exits again at the east, still manages a weak flow of muddy water.

But life for fishermen in Kampung Selamat, a village of 130 homes in the southern end of the lake, has come to a grinding halt because the water is completely gone.

Villager Shamsudin Mohammad, 66, said that the lake started drying up in December.

"We get a dry season yearly, but this is the worst I have seen since staying here in 1960.

"What used to be a perfect place to catch fish is now no more," he said.

Besides Bukit Merah dam, infoke-marau.water.gov.my also lists two other dams as being in the danger zone.

Bukit Kwong Dam in Kelantan has only 7.81% of its water left and Labong Dam in Johor has only 11.98%.

But the situation is different in the Klang Valley as the parks management are not worried about



Stumped: Dead trees that used to be underwater can be seen due to the drying Bukit Merah Dam in Kerian. — ASRI ABDUL GHANI/The Star

potential water shortage.

Desa Water Park manager David Wan said they had storage tanks to provide enough water for the park to run for at least two to three days during a water crisis.

Sunway Lagoon marketing director Michelle Gregory said there was no threat of water shortage as the park's water supply came directly from the lake and was not at all dependent on outside sources.

