

Feeling the El Nino heat

Padi farmers worry lower rainfall will affect harvest

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PETALING JAYA: The El Nino heatwave is expected to affect local food production, with padi farmers in the north already complaining of 50% less harvest.

Vegetable growers in the lowlands, especially in Johor, have also been warned to look for alternative sources of water.

In Alor Setar, a Kampung Suka Menanti farmer known as Din, 40, said the current heatwave was the worst in his 25 years of farming, adding that the situation was made unbearable due to poor water supply.

Din, who claimed to be among the hundreds of farmers affected, said water level at the river dropped from 2.5m to 1.8m recently.

"The irrigation system supplies the padi field with water from the river, but a recent flood mitigation project has hindered the supply and the scarce rainfall does not help.

"Due to the lack of water, the padi grains have shrivelled in size and we expect the yield this time to be halved," he said yesterday.

Hamzah Salleh, 62, who farms his padi field in Pantai Johor said the harvest might be late this season due to the lower rainfall since November.

"During normal seasons, padi can be harvested in 90 days, but dry spells may stretch the growth to up to four months and affect our harvest."



Parched earth: A child pushing his bicycle on a dried-up field in Alor Setar where no rain had been recorded for almost three weeks. — Bernama

Thirty percent of the country's rice is imported from countries such as Thailand.

Recently, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Wilfred Madius Tangau said Peninsular Malaysia along with Limbang and Miri in Sarawak, would be experiencing hot and dry weather until March.

The weather condition is a result of El Nino, which is also expected to reduce rainfall by about 20% to 60%

and cause temperatures to rise between 0.5°C and 2°C.

Cameron Highlands Vegetable Growers Association secretary Chay Ee Mong said farmers in the lowlands might have to start looking at alternative water sources to avoid problems in the next few months.

"For Cameron Highlands, the water sources here are enough.

"Even Perak and Selangor farmers can turn to the former mining areas as an alternative," he said,

adding that they would only be facing problems should the dry season last beyond the predicted period.

Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Seri Tajuddin Abdul Rahman said they did not expect the drop in local production to be alarming as not all source of supply was local.

"If there's a drop of, say 10%, we will increase imports by 10% to compensate," he said, adding that they were monitoring the situation.