

Dry spell threatens padi seed production

BUTTERWORTH: Padi seeds, vital for the growing of rice crops nationwide, are under threat due to the prolonged dry spell.

The hot weather had dried up rivers here, threatening to slow down production of padi seeds.

Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi) officials said the country's two main padi seeding grounds in Pinang Tunggal here and in Parit, Perak, were severely affected.

This might affect the production of rice this year, as padi fields would have to defer harvest later or longer than usual.

Mardi research officer in charge of seed production Azami Adam Muhamad Mujab said the two locations produced 120 tonnes of breeder and foundation seeds.

"The farmers will use the seeds to begin planting by the end of this month and will usually harvest in about three to four months.

"We have not halted production of seeds, but it looks like it will take longer than usual as we do not have adequate irrigation. The situation is the same in Perak," he said at the Pinang Tunggal Mardi station here yesterday.

Azami said the matter was not alarming yet and that Mardi was confident of getting the seeds produced, albeit late.

"It usually takes 90 to 100 days to produce the seeds.



Low water level at **Pinang Tunggal water pump station** in Penang yesterday. Pic by Zulaikha Zainuzman

"We are confident that we can produce them as long as we have water supply," he said.

In the case of the Pinang Tunggal station, the low water level at Sungai Muda had made it nearly impossible to irrigate canals and waterways to

the 146ha seeding station.

Officials said the seeding pockets, where the padi seeds were cultivated, needed at least 1.2m of water.

Currently, two main water pump stations, namely Pinang Tunggal and Bumbung Lima, supply water to

the area.

However, the water supply from Pinang Tunggal station that was supplied to most padi farmers and the Mardi station had been interrupted.

A visit to the Pinang Tunggal water

pump station nearby Sungai Muda at noon yesterday showed the water level to be hovering at 1.6m to 1.7m.

The water pump requires a minimum of 2m to have the water pumped out to the irrigation canals.

There are currently 6,000 padi farmers in Penang, with 90 per cent of them from the Seberang Prai Utara district, which borders the rice bowl state of Kedah.

State Agricultural and Agro-based Industries, Rural Development and Health Committee chairman Dr Afif Bahardin said although the dry spell might threaten production, evidence suggested that higher production was possible.

Comparing with statistics from 2013 and 2014, he said padi farmers in Penang had higher production during the dry spell.

"During the dry spell in 2014, they produced 150,000 tonnes of padi seeds.

"The year before, when it was normal, they produced 130,000 tonnes," said Dr Afif.

He said 40 back-up portable water pumps would be placed along Sungai Muda to help sustain water supply to the padi fields.

"Penang Drainage and Irrigation Department has taken action to draw water from Sungai Muda.

"We are optimistic that normal rainfall will resume early next month in the Seberang Prai Utara district."