

'Study needed before declaring Bukit Merah a disaster area'

IPOH: A thorough study should be done before declaring Bukit Merah, about 90km from here, a disaster area because of the receding level at Tasik Bukit Merah Dam.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim, said that normally, a location would be declared a disaster zone if it was hit by a calamity like floods or large-scale fire.

"When such a declaration is made, it means they (the affected residents) have the right to receive aid such as compassionate payment," he said when contacted yesterday.

The minister said if the dwindling level in a dam adversely affected farmers, it would be the responsibility of the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry to study the situation and take follow-up action.

However, Shahidan said, he would be visiting the affected areas at Bukit Merah

soon to see for himself the effects of El Nino.

He was asked to comment on the statement by Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Zambry Abd Kadir on Sunday that the state government would apply to the Federal Government to declare Bukit Merah a disaster zone.

Zambry said with such a declaration, he hoped the National Security Council (MKN) could assist farmers in the Kerian area to assess the losses due to the depleting water in Bukit Merah Dam.

However, MKN secretary Datuk Seri Alias Ahmad said that it was no longer the agency responsible for assessing any damage or losses incurred by any party in a disaster.

Instead, he said, that responsibility was taken over by the National Disaster Management Agency which was set up last year. — Bernama