

Status of Bukit Merah, Timah Tasoh to be known today

SELAMA: The cabinet high level committee on disaster will decide today whether to declare Bukit Merah and Timah Tasoh as disaster zones.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Shahidan Kassim said the meeting would be chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

"I will present suggestions from discussions with the Drainage and Irrigation Department and agriculture officers," he said during a visit to the Bukit Merah Dam yesterday.

"The current situation is more extreme than the El Nino phenomenon in 1997."

Shahidan said the dam's water level had increased to 6.15m compared with 5.1m on Monday.

"This is due to cloud-seeding operations carried out twice a day at catchment areas throughout the country," he said, adding that tighter enforcement should be carried out at water catchment areas.

He said there had been reports that trees in these areas were felled illegally.

Some proposals were made during the meeting, such as building a second dam and carrying out upgrading work like deepening the dam.

On the cloud-seeding operations, Shahidan said the Federal Government had been spending RM100,000 daily since April 12 to carry out the activity.

It was reported recently that the state government had been urging the Federal Government to declare Kerian as a disaster zone, which would enable farmers to receive aid.

It was also reported that about 5,000ha of padi fields were affected.