



KERATAN AKHBAR

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# Padi fields desperate for rain

## Mitigation works caused river to dry up, say Kedah farmers

**ALOR SETAR:** While the rest of the country is now feeling the heat, a drought is severely affecting farmers in several areas in Kedah.

Checks in Sungai Jagong, Kampung Charok Kering and Lubuk Reba in Pendang show parched padi fields planted with young seedlings beginning to crack from the lack of rain since early November.

The Star met several farmers who have expressed fears that the prolonged dry season would do more damage to their crops.

Abdullah Mohamad, 53, from Sungai Jagong, said most of the farmers in the area began planting for the new season a couple months ago but were now facing the prospect of getting zero value come harvesting season.

"If it does not rain in the next few weeks and if there is no water supply for us, we will likely lose all of our crops."

"Both the fasting month and Hari Raya Aidilfitri are approaching and we need income for the new planting season too," he said.

Abdullah, who is also South Pendang Farmers Organisation (PPK) chairman, said flood mitigation works in Sungai Pendang could have contributed to the lack of water in the area.

"Last time, it was not like this during the dry season. We could still pump water from Sungai Pendang to our padi fields but now, the river itself is drying up. We cannot do anything," he said, adding that the river had been their natural water source for many generations.

The worst affected areas are Kampung Charok Kering, Sungai Jagong and Lubuk Reba in the southern part of Pendang district, about a 40-minute drive from



Alor Setar.

Mohd Yusoff Che Ali, 44, said he could lose more than RM10,000 if the situation were to continue.

"At certain places, farmers can lose 50% of their crops. But if this situation continues, it will be a zero harvest for us," he said, hoping that the relevant agencies could work out something to help the farmers.

Zakaria Awang Kechik, 55, who has been a farmer for more than 30 years, suggested that as a short-term measure, state and federal agencies could supply them with mobile pumps to channel water from further away to the affected padi fields.

"This mobile pump can at least pump water from other rivers near Sungai Pendang - at least it can wet our padi fields. This will also help

our crops to sustain until the rainy season," he said.

It is estimated that all 1,036 padi farmers in southern Pendang are affected by the drought. Under South Pendang PPK, there are about 1,750ha of padi fields, with more than half being hit hard.

When contacted, Deputy Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Sim Tze Izin said the government understood the issue and sympathised with the farmers.

He said the government was working out gratuities to help farmers overcome the losses.

"We know their predicament. It is an act of God but we are working out something to help them," he said.

On the infrastructure to help farmers, Sim said the majority of

allocations for development projects under his ministry already went to the farmers, with a few billion ringgit being set aside for infrastructure for padi planting.

"Every year, allocations for *wang ehsan* (gratuity) are there. We will have to look at the losses and we will work out a formula. Muda Agriculture Development Authority is collecting the data," he said.

He said the current situation was caused by global warming and climate change.

"Climate change is real and affecting agriculture and it is going to affect our food security as well," he said, adding that mobile pumps would be provided soon.

"The pumps will be deployed by the relevant state and federal agencies."

**In dire straits:** Farmers lamenting the current condition of Sungai Pendang. — ZHAFFARAN NASIB/The Star