

King urges help for drought victims

Farmers to be offered temporary work

POST REPORTERS

Their Majesties the King and Queen have expressed concern over the drought that has already hit 22 provinces and is likely to last until at least May this year.

The King and the Queen have closely followed the situation and recently asked the government to "relieve the impact and help people to the fullest", Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said as he chaired a meeting on drought solution packages yesterday.

Rivers and reservoirs across the country are currently running low, following unusually low rainfall last year and the situation will remain unchanged over the next few months as the Meteorological Department forecasts 3-5% less rain than usual over the period, Gen Prayut said.

The premier went on to say that authorities should speed up work to cope with water scarcity during the hot season, which officially began on Feb 29, and prepare to store water in the rainy season later in the year.

Earlier the cabinet gave the green light to more than 2,000 projects aimed at ensuring enough water for household consumption by searching for more groundwater sites and building artesian wells.

Gen Prayut yesterday also demanded officials go ahead with plans to increase water storage capacity by 276 million

cubic metres in the rainy season.

He also urged city people not seriously affected by water to do their bit. Though they do not share the same plight as villagers in parched areas, "they still need to realise the value of every drop of water when taking a bath or turning on tap water," Gen Prayut said.

So far his government has declared 5,849 villages in 22 provinces as "drought zones" for receiving urgent help.

The Highways Department is preparing to help farmers in these areas who lose income due to water shortages by temporarily hiring them to work on road maintenance and environmental projects from April to June, according to department chief Sarawut Songsivilai.

They will help officials repair road surfaces, clear sewers and cut roadside weeds. Others may be employed to help the department plant trees as part of state attempts to reduce the harmful levels of PM2.5 micro dust.

Transport Minister Saksayam Chidchob earlier said officials need to find ways to compensate farmers in order to mitigate the effect of the drought on the economy.