

Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam to face severe drought



Cambodian fishermen work on a boat on the Mekong River in Phnom Penh.

A SEVERE drought is expected to hit Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam from now until January, threatening agricultural production in these countries.

According to experts, the drought is expected to occur in the four lower Mekong River Basin countries as the river reaches its lowest levels in about 60 years. The Mekong River Commission (MRC) said in a statement that most parts of the lower Mekong basin were now experiencing an exceptionally regionally low flow since June.

According to the Bangkok Post, the commission also said that of the four countries, Thailand and Cambodia will be the hardest hit compared with Laos and Vietnam.

The MRC said that the drought is caused by insufficient rainfall during the wet season with a delayed arrival and earlier departure of the monsoon rain and an El Nino event that has created an abnormally high temperature and high evaporation.

During a normal year, the monsoon rains usually starts in late May and ends in October. However, for this year, the rains started almost two weeks late and ended about three weeks earlier.

The preliminary findings also noted that Cambodia's northeastern part, including Oddar Meanchey, Preah Vihear and Siem Reap provinces, and the north and northeastern regions of Thailand would be affected the most while parts of central and northern Laos and Vietnam's Mekong delta would also be impacted but less severely.

The commission's Regional Flood and Drought Management Center head Lam Hung Son, who led the analysis, said this year's prolonged dry weather condition could possibly adversely impact agricultural and crop production.

"The issue of water shortage for consumption could also come into play as the drought persists," he added.

The drought condition is forecasted to worsen from December to early January, with most parts of the basin having little to no rain.

Established in 1995, the commission is an intergovernmental organisation that works directly with the governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam to jointly manage the shared water resources and the sustainable development of the Mekong River.

Meanwhile, Cambodian Water Resource and Meteorology Ministry spokesman Chan Youttha said that the water situation in Cambodia has not yet been a challenge and the ministry has prepared measures to manage water during the dry season.

The MRC Council, its highest ministerial body, will meet and discuss the drought issue next week during an annual gathering here in Phnom Penh.

The council is also expected to approve a Drought Management Strategy as part of ongoing efforts to address much needed mitigation measures, information sharing and dissemination mechanism about drought.