

FLOODS WATER RETENTION SCHEME

Experts urge formal compensation plan

Rural people must be paid for their sacrifices

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The compensation system for farmers who allow their farmland to absorb excess water to save Bangkok from floods should be formalised to improve the water retention process, water experts recommended yesterday.

Sumet Tantiwajkul, secretary-general of the Chai Pantana Foundation, said water retention has depended on the cooperation of farmers and that has resulted in some unfavourable outcomes.

In order to run the work consistently, the government should systemise compensation procedures for affected farmers, he said.

"At present, we are solving the problem in emergency situations. And every time there is excess water, we have to beg farmers for help. It's time for us to work systematically," said Dr Sumet.

He said that such a system existed in the United States where the authorities leased farmland for a particular period of time for water diversion purposes.

Moreover, he said officials should work harder to find water retention areas, adding that he had learned that there were many abandoned wells in the eastern region that could receive more water.

According to Dr Sumet, His Majesty the King has been concerned about mega-infrastructure projects that obstructed waterways, causing severe floods.

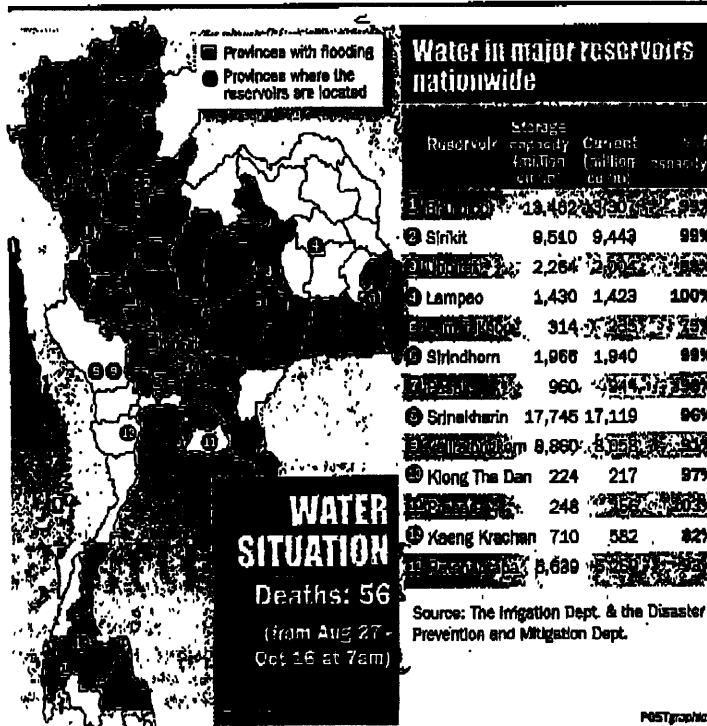
Ministries should now take flooding issues into account when they develop infrastructure projects, he said.

Katumi Mutsaers, secretary-general of the Asia Pacific Association of Hydrology and Water Resources, supported Dr Sumet's recommendations, saying urban residents should not leave rural people who sacrifice their farmland without any compensation.

Meanwhile, agricultural officials yesterday could not reach agreement on appropriate compensation rates for farmers who have opened their farmland to water run-off from the North.

Agricultural inspector-general Theera Wongsamut, who chaired a closed-door meeting at the ministry, said the officials would review past compensation amounts to calculate the rates, which should be based on farmers' investments rather than on their farm produce values.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) has allowed the Royal Irrigation Department (RID) to channel water from the Chao Phraya river to canals in



the inner part of Bangkok to ease flooding in the Chao Phraya river basin when sea levels rise from Oct 23-25.

The water diversion into the inner Bangkok canals, including Klong Phadung Krung Kasem, Klong Sam Sen, and Klong Chong Nonsee, would help speed up water drainage from the Central Plains, said RID chief Samart Chokkanapitark.

The BMA's water drainage office assured that Bangkok residents would not be affected by the water diversion scheme because the city's waterways had the capacity to receive more water.

However, Bangkok Governor Apirak Kosayodhin asked the RID to adjust its flood control plan by diverting excess water to the Suphan Buri and Tha Chin rivers in the western province of Suphan Buri to ensure that Bangkok would be spared the run-off.

Meanwhile, a senior irrigation official in charge of diverting floodwater into farmland in Ayutthaya province, said the department yesterday began diverting overflow from the Chao Phraya, Pa Sak and Lop Buri rivers into six major fields in the province, covering about 440,000 rai, where the water would be retained for seven days. The water level is now measured at 1.5 metres.

The official said he has not yet received any reports of opposition to the plan from local farmers who had previously expressed

concern that the water would damage their rice crops which are about to be harvested.

Sompong Chaowanlan, the provincial irrigation chief, said Thung Makham Yong field in Bang Ban district, where the King offered his private land for use as a water retention area, currently holds around 1.5 million cubic metres.

"Ayutthaya's farmland will be able to receive as much as 150 million cu m of floodwater which will be retained in our fields for about a week until the flood disaster eases," said Mr Sompong.

Ayutthaya provincial officials also reported that villagers were suffering from drinking water shortages as several drinking water manufacturing plants were inundated, while raw water for drinking water production was of poor quality due to water pollution in flood-hit areas.

Meanwhile, Her Majesty the Queen and HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn have donated pre-cooked food for affected villagers in Ang Thong province. They instructed the Thai Red Cross Society to deploy cooks at the provincial hall to make 2,000 food boxes for distribution to villagers in remote areas every day.

Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont also approved a 20-million-baht disaster relief fund for Nakhon Sawan to help around 200,000 people severely hit by floods in the province.



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