

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

INSUFFICIENT RAINFALL PROBLEM FOR AGRICULTURE

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[Article by Latheef Farook: "Rainfall Not Enough for Cultivation"]

[Text] ALTHOUGH last week's (January 30 and 31) rainfall was apparently heavy, most of it was absorbed by the soil and except in Wadi Idhlin in Ras Al Khaimah, there was hardly any flow of water in any wadi in the northern and eastern areas.

Experts described the rainfall as too small for agricultural purposes as also for recharging underground water levels in the agricultural regions. Even in the Wadi Idhlin area the water collected was not sufficient for recharging the underground water table.

A spokesman of the Dubai office of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries told Khaleej Times yesterday that the maximum rainfall (38.8mm) was recorded in Fujairah on January 31 — and that, too, was not enough to recharge the underground water table which touched down an unexpected low level due to inadequate or no rain at all in the past two to three years.

Since the rain season, mainly in the agricultural regions of the northern and eastern emirates, begins by January and continues up to March and even April, the possibility of more rains cannot be ruled out.

According to the spokesman there should be at least a minimum of 50mm of heavy and continuous rainfall for a moderate recharging of the underground water table. The intensity and antecedent rainfall, he pointed out, have been crucial in this region for causing flood. But a mere flood is not sufficient. Intensity is important.

The figures of rainfall in millimetres

in different parts of Dubai and the northern emirates/ on January 30 and 31 were: 2.3 and 11.6 in Dubai, 1.5 and 19.7 Sharjah, 1.0 and 12.0 Ras Al Khaimah, 0.4 and 28.6 Masfut, 4.6 and 14.6 Dhaid, 8.6 and 13.8 Jebel Sherimal, 9.0 and 15.0 Marbad, 7.6 and 18.4 Masafi, 4.0 and 17.0 Bitna, 16.6 and 17.4 Farah, 3.2 and 38.8 Fujairah, 2.4 and 14.0 Digdaga, 0.8 and 5.0 Burayrat, 1.4 and 21.6 Shaam, 0.8 and 12.4 Hamranyah, 1.0 and 11.2 Khatt, 2.8 and 33.6 Idhm, 6.4 and 26.2 Ghail, 2.8 and 20.6 Mchiba, 1.0 and 23.6 Fih, 0.8 and 20.6 Hibab, 6.0 and 26.0 Awn, 4.8 and 19.4 Munai and 2.2 and 28.8 Howeilat.

Rains were heavier at most of the places on the second day.

The spokesman said in many areas the water table had gone down to a very low level and rain was badly needed. In some areas, he said, the wells had dried up.

Agricultural activities in these areas depend to a great extent on rains and the lack of it for the past two years had caused numerous problems for the farmers. The government has been systematically trying to conserve every drop of rainwater by building dams at all important places.

The dam at Wadih Bieh at Ras Al Khaimah built at a cost of Dh10 million was opened in December 1982. This 220 metre long, 18 metre high and 92 metre wide dam has a capacity of conserving nine million cubic metres of water. Adhm and Al Ghail in Ras Al Khaimah and Al Hamr at Fujairah are three more dams completed.

In addition, the ministry introduced the drip irrigation system to prevent the wastage of water and this helped reduce

the requirement of 400 million cubic metres of water to 200 million cubic metres.

Measures were also taken to educate the farmers of modern methods of irrigation to economise the use of water. A working paper published by the ministry in 1982 on the water situation pointed out that the ground water available then for agricultural and domestic use was only 200 million cubic metres although the overall annual consumption stood around 625 million cubic metres.

The ministry also undertook several studies in cooperation with UN Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation to explore means of conserving water resources while increasing the agricultural output.

Meanwhile, Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Saeed Mohamed Al

Raghabani held a meeting this week to discuss ways and means of assisting farmers to carry out their work uninterrupted.

At this meeting, attended by under-secretary Hamad Salman and assistant under-secretary Mohamed Moosa Jassim, the minister reiterated the importance of popularising modern irrigation methods among the farmers to continue their activities. He asked officials to make the necessary arrangements to introduce new irrigation methods and to train the farmers in these methods.

He also instructed the officials concerned to ensure that the farmers in all agricultural zones obtain the services needed from the ministry. Officials were told to seek means to eliminate diseases afflicting livestock and train personnel towards this end.

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