

Control development, Penang told

FLOOD WOES: State govt should ensure drainage system is maintained, build proper irrigation system, says DID

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THE Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) yesterday attributed the recent flash floods in Penang to failure of the state government to properly control development.

DID director-general Datuk Seri Zulkefli Hassan said the state government should ensure that it carried out sustainable development by taking into consideration the well-

being of the people.

"More importantly, it should not point fingers at the Federal Government for the flash floods in the state," he told the *New Straits Times* yesterday.

Zulkefli responding to a statement by Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, who had blamed the Federal Government for the flash floods that hit Kampung Batu Maung on Tuesday.

On Deepavali last Saturday, flash floods hit 14 villages and several areas on the island and mainland, which affected about 600 people, following a three-hour downpour.

The state government has, on numerous occasions, blamed the Federal Government for not approving a RM350 million grant to mitigate Penang's chronic flash flood woes.

Zulkefli said when development was rapid but not properly implemented, siltation would flow into the drainage system and rivers.

He said the state government should ensure that the existing drainage system was maintained

properly and build a proper irrigation system.

Zulkefli said the Federal Government had approved RM150 million for flood mitigation programmes along Sungai Pinang under the 11th Malaysia Plan (11MP).

He said another RM1 million had been approved for next year under the "Second Rolling Plan" of the 11MP and that the initial works would be carried out early next year.

"The Federal Government is concerned by the flash floods plaguing Penang.

"Through the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, it had approved RM150 million for the purpose."

Meanwhile, Bernama reported that Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) adviser Kanda Kumar said that it did not take an expert to see that "Penang is being developed unsustainably as this can be seen even through the layman's eye".

"Buildings are being built wherever there is land without taking into

consideration their location and density.

"When an area is being developed, the ground is filled with concrete. Hence, the soil is not able to absorb rainwater anymore, causing it to flow down and flood low-lying areas."

Kanda said due to high-density developments, water usage capacity had increased but the drainage system was not upgraded to accommodate the amount of water flowing into drains, causing it to overflow.

He cited Bandar Baru Air Itam, which was inundated on Deepavali, as an area that was over-developed with high-density high-rise buildings built across the township up to Paya Terubong.

"Upstream water does not encounter any barricades before flowing down. The soil is not able to absorb anymore water while the drainage system is outdated and unsystematic. Due to this, we have to brace for floods. All this is due to overdevelopment, as it is a chain

reaction."

However, Kanda said the state should have a "Plan B" to tackle the issue and not push the responsibility entirely to the Federal Government to solve.

"The state is the one that approves development projects. Hence, it has the power to ask developers to upgrade the drainage system affected by these projects. If that happens, we will not have outdated drainage systems anymore."

He said beside making developers upgrade drains in development areas and have drains channel water to the sea, the state should build retention ponds in low-lying areas and control development in such areas.

"The state must do more for the long term to minimise flooding, instead of sitting and hoping the money will come.

"I believe there are other ways to solve the problem and I believe the state has the capacity to do it, including in terms of funding."