

Kelantan bracing for the Red Flood

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KOTA BARU: Is Kelantan ready for the next "Bah Merah" (Red Flood)?

This month marks the anniversary of the great deluge which, according to the state flood chronicles, struck every 40 years since 1926.

The second surge was in 1967 and saw about 537,000 or 84 per cent of the state population badly affected. Some 125,000 were evacuated while 38 people drowned.

And equally worrying was the prediction by Meteorological Department officials of another big flood to affect the east coast states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang by year's end.

However, it is not known whether the magnitude will be anywhere near the Red Flood or the one in 2004, where 12 people were killed and more than 11,000 displaced.

The latter cost more than RM10 million in damage to property, livestock and crops.

The federal government also had to fork out more than RM2 million in disaster relief funds for affected families.

Preparation is the key to surviving the year-end deluge, since floods are a fact of life for Kelantan.

Nevertheless, are the locals wary of these latest predictions of impending disasters?

Trishaw rider Mohammed Husin, 74, who has lived on a rickety wooden boathouse by the Sungai Kelantan for more than 50 years, is a survivor of the second Red Flood and the flood in 2004.

The ongoing sunny weather during this monsoon season probably did not give him reason to seek shelter on higher ground.

"For me, there is nothing to worry about. My house was not affected by the floods.

"Thanks to several retention ropes I tied to the riverbank, river currents cannot pull my house away," he said.

The authorities, however, are not taking the current weather for granted and have been bracing for the start of the monsoon season in November.

Kelantan Drainage and Irrigation Department director Lim Chow Hock said 540mm of rain was expected to fall in the coming weeks, and it would only take three days of downpours to flood Kelantan.

"Geographically, Kelantan is prone to floods due to the state's low-lying areas in Kuala Krai, Machang, Pasir Mas and Kota Baru, which alone hold 80 per cent of water catchment areas in the state," he said.

The federal government, meanwhile, has set aside funds



The 1967 deluge caused extensive loss of lives and properties in Kota Baru.

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from the National Disaster Relief Committee for aid and compensation to those who would be affected not only in Kelantan, but also in Terengganu and Pahang.

Its chairman Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said on Oct 25 that 4,050 evacuation centres had been prepared to accommodate those displaced.

About 400 of those centres are in Kelantan.

Others have also been preparing for the deluge since early this year.

Boatmaker Roslan Mohammad usually makes fibreglass watercraft for fishermen and marine enforcement authorities but over the years, he began receiving special orders from people who would probably never use their vessels for fishing or catching smugglers.

These orders are for smaller vessels which cost about RM800 and can carry only a maximum of four people.

They are not made for the rigours of fishing or travelling in the open sea.

Such boats, the 46-year-old said, were ordered in anticipation of the massive floods which were the annual norm in Kelantan during the peak of the monsoon season.

"They are the cheapest boats that I build. I do not expect them to be used for anything other than travelling during the flood season," Roslan said at his shop in Kampung Tebing here.

He so far had 20 orders from such individuals but did not know who they were for, save the fact that they came from flood-prone areas in Tumpat.

In Tanah Merah district, the villagers of Kampung Paloh Hilir have started pulling out tapioca and yam which they planted along the banks of Sungai Kelantan before the onset of high waters.

The crop was also popular, they

said, during the monsoon season and stalls were set up along the Kota Baru-Tanah Merah main road to sell varieties of tapioca including *ubi badak putih*, *ubi itik*, *ubi keladi*, *ubi keledak* and *ubi kemili*.

Villager Azizah Daud said the tubers were usually harvested and were a hit with villagers during the monsoon season.

"They are usually planted after the monsoon, sometime in February, and take about 10 months to mature.

"It is usually eaten during the rainy season," she said adding that a portion of the harvest was saved as ration during the flood.

Maybe the floods are such a norm in the state that some have taken the predictions for granted while others are doing everything they can to survive.

Hopefully, those living on the boathouses will live to tell their tale again this time around.

Warning of strong winds

KUALA LUMPUR: The Department of Meteorology yesterday issued a warning on strong winds and rough seas in the east coast coastal waters of Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

The conditions are dangerous to shipping and coastal activities.

It said Typhoon Durian — centred near latitude 13.9 degrees North and longitude 114.3 degrees East, approximately 620km to the southeast of Nha Trang, Vietnam, at 5am yesterday — was tracking westwards at 16kmph.

The second category strong winds and rough seas warning issued last night had been upgraded to third category for Sabah and Sarawak and second category for the east coast in the peninsula. — Bernama