

800 border soldiers can handle rescue work, too



Children playing in floodwaters while their elders keep a close watch in Kampung Kedai Lama, Rantau Panjang, yesterday. — NST picture by Zaman Huri Isa

RANTAU PANJANG: The 800 soldiers on duty at the Malaysia-Thailand border in the state are enough to maintain peace, besides assisting other government agencies in flood duties during the monsoon season.

Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Dr Abdul Latif Ahmad said the additional task should not be a reason or excuse for the soldiers not to carry out their duties well.

"It's really a challenging task for them. To take care of the 515km border with southern Thailand and, at the same time, assist various agencies with flood rescue work.

"The army personnel not only take care of the safety of flood victims, but also their belongings that are left behind.

"We do not want any irresponsible party to take the opportunity to break into the victims' houses," he said after visiting flood evacuees at SK Gual Tinggi here yesterday.

Some villagers living along the Golok river have refused to move out during the floods as they fear their homes will be broken into.

The villagers claimed that a group involving mostly smugglers would take advantage of the river's rising water level to come by boats and escape with their valuables.

Latif, however, said the responsibility of safeguarding the belongings of villagers should not be solely left to the army, which took over the border duty from the General Operations Force recently.

"Everyone must play their part. If there are break-ins, they should alert the authorities — the police first, or Rela."

There are 302 flood victims taking shelter at SK Gual Tinggi since Friday. The evacuees from 109 families are from several villages in the district, including Kampung Tok Deh and Kampung Lubok Setol.