

21 stranded visitors rescued

TRAPPED FOR TWO DAYS: Singaporeans who sneaked into Endau-Rompin National Park flown out by helicopter

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TWENTY-ONE Singaporeans, including a year-old, stranded in the Endau-Rompin National Park for two days, were rescued yesterday.

The group and three locals, who entered the park without permission, were flown out by Fire and Rescue Department's helicopters about noon.

Johor National Parks Corporation director Suhairi Hashim said the Singaporeans had sought permission to enter the park from officers at its branch in Kahang on Dec 17, but their application was rejected because of the bad weather which could cause floods and landslides.

"The area has been cordoned off and has not been opened to the public since Dec 1 as it was not safe. However, it was learnt that the Singaporeans sneaked into the park on five four-wheel drive vehicles."

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Suhairi Hashim
Johor National Parks Corporation director

The journey into the national park from Kahang town is through a 56km dirt road. Because of the constant downpour, the road was muddy and slippery.

The Singaporeans arrived at the park's office late in the evening and the officers-in-charge had no choice but to allow them to spend the night at its chalet.

"It was already getting dark by then and if the officers had told the Singaporeans to turn back, it would have put them in greater danger, in addition to the risk of being attacked by wild elephants," Suhairi said.

The next day, the park officers accompanied the visitors out, but they were stranded at Sungai Lembakoh, when flood waters cut off their access route.

The visitors were taken back to the chalets. The park officers radioed for food supplies to be flown in as the park had been closed since Dec 1.



Visitors who were **stranded** in the Endau Rompin National Park, near Peta, Pahang, **rescued** by a Fire and Rescue Department helicopter. Pic by Ikhwan Muhammad

However, by 12.45pm yesterday, the Singaporeans, and the three locals who had helped get them into the park, were flown out by the Fire and Rescue Department Air Unit's Mi-8 helicopters based in Subang, Selangor.

The visitors returned to Singapore by bus.

Suhairi said the Johor National

Parks Corporation had alerted the Tourism Department about the closure of the Endau-Rompin National Park and posted it on their official website and Facebook

He added that the park had heavy rain about the same time of the year, every year, and all travel agents were aware of its closure.

Suhairi urged people not to tres-

pass into the national parks as it is very dangerous.

Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs thanked the Malaysian authorities for mounting the rescue mission.

The Singaporeans were in good health and had since arrived in the republic, the ministry said in a statement.

Kluang sees more evacuees

JOHOR BARU: The number of flood victims in Kluang has increased to 2,385 people from 600 families, as of 3pm yesterday.

A total of 24 evacuation centres have been opened throughout the district, with six of them in Mengkil, six in Kahang, five in Machap, three in Paloh, and two each in Layang and Mahkota.

These bring the flood victims in Johor to 2,676 people in 36 evacuation centres in Kluang, Segamat, Batu Pahat, Pontian and Kulaijaya.

In Skudai, the flood situation improved when the downpour that began on Saturday stopped yesterday.

An evacuation centre at Sekolah Kebangsaan Skudai Batu 10 was closed yesterday, and all 33 victims

have since returned to their homes in Kampung Laut, Skudai.

In **Batu Pahat**, another evacuation centre was opened in SK Bandan Baru and until 2pm yesterday, some 24 victims from seven families were placed there.

The total victims in the district are 88 people.

The other evacuation centres in Batu Pahat are at Balai Raya Haji Kamisan, SK Kota Dalam, and SK Taman Sri Kota.

A spokesman for the state Drainage and Irrigation Department said until 2pm yesterday, the level at Sungai Lenik, Ladang Cha'ah, near Segamat, had increased to 6.47m from 6m the previous day.

In **Muar**, a flood operation room

spokesman said the authorities were on standby as the sky was overcast throughout the day.

The water level at Sungai Muar was still safe at 1.42m. The danger level was 2.43m.

In **Segamat**, more than five flood evacuation centres were opened as of 3pm yesterday. They are at Balai Raya Kampung Pagoh 2, Kampung Usahajaya, Spangloi, Balai Islam Kampung Paya Dalam and Batu Badak.

In **Kuala Lumpur**, Drainage and Irrigation water resources management head Hanapi Mohamad Noor said other rivers which had breached the warning level were Sungai Golok at Rantau Panjang, Kelantan, Sungai Padas at Beaufort



A family of **flood victims** sharing a meal at SRJKC Ping Ming flood evacuation centre in Kluang, Johor, yesterday. Pic by Shahrul M. Zain

and at Tenom, Sabah, and Sungai Stapang at Sibu, Sarawak.

He said no rainfall had been recorded at the Sungai Lenik and Sungai Mengkilob catchment areas since mid-

night and the situation was expected to be back to normal by tomorrow if there was no more rain.

There was no sign of flooding in Sabah and Sarawak, he added.



Victims get RM500 aid after floods recede

KUANTAN: The government provides aid and assistance to all, regardless of their background, during disaster, especially floods.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz said as a responsible government, it was their duty to provide for the people in times of such hardship and after that, unlike in some countries where aid was only provided during the disaster.

"We understand that victims of disasters need money fast, like the flood victims who need it to repair homes damaged by the floods. That is why the government had started distributing the RM500 federal aid for the flood victims this year.

"The agencies involved were very efficient and had submitted the list of names to us shortly after the floods subsided," he said, after distributing federal aid to flood victims here yesterday.

On a statement by the National Natural Disaster Relief Committee that federal aid would only be given to victims who sought shelter at the relief centres, Nazri said this was to ensure that only the affected victims would receive the aid.

"Their names will be in the list compiled by the relevant agencies. We don't want irresponsible

people (who are not affected by the floods) to take advantage and make false claims. It's not right."

He said a total of 3,055 victims from 730 families were evacuated in Pahang during the floods which occurred between Dec 10 and 14.

Kuantan has the highest number of flood evacuees at 2,275 people from 556 families.

Nazri said the floods were caused by heavy rains that had reached 200mm daily, compared with the average of 60mm daily throughout the year.

One of the federal aid recipients, Siti Fatimah Deraman, 56, said she was grateful to receive the RM500 as it could help her repair some of her electrical appliances that were damaged by the floods.

"The water rose very fast and my family could not save most of our belongings," said Siti, who stays with her two children and three grandchildren in Kampung Razali here.

Her neighbour, Rohana Jusoh, 34, said she would use the money to buy books and stationery for her children, as most of them were damaged during the floods.

Nazri also distributed the federal aid to 114 families in Rompin later in the afternoon.