

3-hour downpour overwhelms city

KUCHING: A three-hour downpour here yesterday caused the worst flash floods since 2004, forcing the evacuation of about 300 people.

Three schools — SK Batu Lintang, SMK Batu Lintang and SK St Joseph — were closed.

Hundreds of people stayed at home or were late for work as some roads were impassable.

SK Batu Lintang and SMK Batu Lintang were flooded while SK St Joseph's teachers and pupils were unable to reach the school as the road leading to the school was flooded.

"The rainfall was very high and the city's drainage system could not cope with it," Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu said at a briefing yesterday.

Jabu was among those who could not get out of their houses.

Bank Rakyat Kuching branch manager Azman Abd Aziz said most of his staff turned up for work on time but there were very few customers.

Low-lying areas in the city and Jalan Rock, the main road in the city, were inundated.

The area where the state government quarters once stood in Batu Lintang was inundated.

It was here that the car belonging to the mother of SMK Batu Lintang student Kho Ying Qi stalled as they were taking the short cut to her school. In less than an hour, the car was nearly submerged.

Walking away from the rising waters proved disastrous for the sixth

former, who had only started school the day before.

Motorists who were unaware of the situation drove straight into floodwaters. Traffic came to a standstill as it was the rush hour between 6am and 9am.

Other major areas such as Jalan Laksamana Cheng Ho, Batu Kawa, Stapok, Batu Lintang, Jalan Green, Jalan Baddaruddin, Matang, Petra Jaya, Sultan Tengah and Tabuan Jaya were impassable. However, by noon, the water had receded.

The 305 people who were forced out of their homes to relief centres were from the flood-prone areas of Batu Kawa and residential areas such as Taman Desa Wira and Kampung Sinar Budi, which were under one-metre of water, and houses

along Jalan Stephen Yong. The evacuees have since returned home.

The only people smiling during yesterday's floods were tow-truck operators.

One operator, who wanted to be known only as Ah Ping, said he was deluged with phone calls requesting his service.

"I received calls as early as 6am."

However, there was little he could do until the water subsided, he added.

"My boys were stuck at Jalan Rock due to the bad traffic and floodwaters."

Nevertheless, by 1pm, he and his workers managed to tow eight cars to workshops.

Jabu said more rain was expected in the next 48 hours.