

There can never be zero flooding

STOP FINGER-POINTING: The people should also do their part to reduce the severity

THE dreaded floods that normally come with the monsoon season have started in Pahang last week. More than 3,000 people were evacuated, mostly from Kuantan.

As usual, the blame game has yet to end although the flash floods that almost paralysed the state capital subsided on the same day while the evacuees have all returned home last weekend.

Many are quick to blame the authorities for the worst floods in the town area in recent years, claiming that the choked drainage system and poor maintenance culture are the main reasons for the incident which was also highlighted by foreign news agencies.

Some also blamed visionless planning by the local authority which has resulted in over-development in certain areas and made existing drainage less effective. However, Pahang Solid Waste and Public Cleaning Corporation director Mohd Nor Apandi Abd Aziz

claims that the flash floods were not caused by clogged drains but due to an extremely heavy downpour on Christmas Eve.

At the same time, he says, the high water tide had also worsened the situation, with water rising up to two metres in certain areas which forced the closure of several stretches.

During the five-hour flash floods, hundreds of motorists were also stranded in massive traffic jams while dozens of vehicles parked at the basement level of hotels and shopping complexes were damaged by the flood water.

Unknown to many, some of the reporters covering the flash floods were also trapped in their vehicles while others had to rush home and salvage their belongings when water rose almost one metre there.

Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) director-general Datuk Ahmad Husaini Sulaiman, in an interview with the *New Straits Times* recently, admitted that there could never be zero flooding al-

though the government had spent billions of ringgit on various flood mitigation projects nationwide.

"If the rainfall is too intense, then the system that we've built earlier for the 100-year return period won't be able to cope with it. Billions have been spent, yes, but we must also understand that structural measures are expensive," he said.

But that did not stop the government from planning and implementing various measures that could at least minimise the problem, especially in flood-prone areas such as Kuantan and Pekan.

For example, the government has spent RM45 million for the flood mitigation project in Kuantan which includes the construction of a bund along Sungai Kuantan.

Water pumps have also been installed at strategic locations to help drain rain water into Sungai Kuantan during a downpour, while a retention pond in Sungai Isap was built to keep excess water from flowing back into the river when it overflows.

Even without the retention pond, the flood mitigation project has already proven effective in reducing the severity of floods in Kuantan during the wet spell last year.

The situation has also improved with the upgrading of the drainage

system in the town area by the Kuantan Municipal Council (MPK) at a cost of RM100,000.

As for Pekan, the DID is spending RM63 million for a flood mitigation project which includes the construction of a bund and the upgrading of the existing drainage and irrigation system.

A three-kilometre wave breaker at the mouth of Sungai Pahang in Tanjung Agas is part of the RM258 million project. It will help stop the formation of a shoal or sandbars, near the river mouth, which could hamper the flow of water from Sungai Pahang into the sea.

The flood mitigation projects in the two districts will help protect 490,000 people in Kuantan and another 24,000 in Pekan from serious flooding that occurs almost every year.

While the people have the right to complain, they should be grateful that the government has actually done its best to reduce the severity of floods in the state.

Those affected by floods should also be thankful to the authorities and the people who have worked hard to evacuate the victims and ensure that they have a comfortable stay at the relief centres.

Even the royal family has joined the effort. Tengku Mahkota of Pa-

hang Tengku Abdullah and his consort Tengku Puan Pahang Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah had also visited the victims and cooked for them.

State Health director Dr Norhizan Ismail said his staff had worked round-the-clock to provide immediate health services and medical check-ups in the affected areas and relief centres during the recent flooding.

With the support from the environmental health squads, they also ensure the cleanliness of the toilets and surroundings at the relief centres to prevent water-borne diseases like leptospirosis, a bacterial infection that was transferred to humans through water tainted with animal's urine.

All these efforts will be useless if the public fail to appreciate them and do their part as well.

Instead of pointing the finger, they should help the authorities keep the town and its drainage system clean from all types of rubbish which causes clogged drains and flash floods.

And they should always remember that MPK has also created litter-free zones to educate the public not to throw rubbish indiscriminately.



Members of the public helping a motorist whose car stalled in a flash flood in Kuantan last week.



ON THE FRONTLINE
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