

George Town hit by flash floods

PARALYSED: A five-hour downpour wreaks havoc in 7 major roads, causing huge traffic jams, 3,000 affected

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CONTINUOUS rain for more than five hours since 3.30am yesterday caused flash floods which paralysed the island and wreaked havoc as thousands found themselves in knee-deep floodwaters.

Low-lying parts of the city here were inundated.

It was the island's worst flooding since 1992.

In some areas, floodwaters measuring 2m caused hundreds of vehicles to be caught in traffic jams along major roads that lasted more than four hours.

Jalan Perak, part of Jalan Masjid Negeri, Jalan Anson, Jalan Kampung Makam, Jalan Makloom, Jalan Sungai Pinang and Jalan Patani and its surrounding areas were among those badly affected.

Part of Jalan Air Itam, adjacent to the state mosque, was inundated, making it impassable to vehicles.

Many motorists drove through the mud-filled floodwaters, while motorcyclists took shelter underneath the overhead bridge in Jalan Scotland.

State Welfare Committee chairman Phee Boon Poh said the downpour started at 6am and continued for five hours.

The volume of rain water on Penang Hill was 168mm, which was more than half of the average monthly of 300mm.

Although more than 3,000 residents, including those in flood-prone Jalan P. Ramlee were severely affected, Phee said they were not evacuated as the situation was not that "critical".



Traffic slows to a crawl in Jalan Air Hitam, Penang, after it was inundated yesterday. Pic by Ramdzan Masiam

"The authorities were monitoring the flood situation and they noticed there was no sign of the water rising after two hours of downpour.

"We, therefore, decided that

evacuation was not necessary," he said, adding that there was also no rubbish caught in main drains.

Phee added that the floodwaters receded by 11am.

Northeast district Civil Defence Department officer (disaster and operations) Maxwell Panchai said 30 rescue teams were deployed to the affected areas.

"We also sent two four-wheel

drives, two lorries and a boat to rescue trapped residents," he told the *New Sunday Times*.

Meanwhile, when asked about his pledge to shave his head bald if

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floods hit his constituency, Datuk Keramat assemblyman Jagdeep Singh Deo replied: "I did not say I will go bald each time the area is flooded."

State Barisan Nasional Youth chairman Oh Tong Keong chided the state government for not taking remedial measures to avert flash floods.

He said the floods were proof that the state government had not carried out any significant infrastructure project to improve the situation.

"The previous BN-led state government had implemented various measures to improve drainage."

Oh said yesterday's massive traffic jams in Jalan Masjid Negeri and other roads caused by the flash floods were a cause for concern.

He called on the DAP-led state government to stop politicking and focus on improving basic public amenities.

"The traffic is horrendous. We cannot afford to have such an incident happen again.

"The state government must come out with measures to alleviate the problem."

An official with the state Meteorological Department, when contacted, said the rainy weather was expected to continue in the coming week.

"The phenomenon is normal as it is the shift of the monsoon season from northeast towards the southwest."

Resident Fauziah Yaacob, 39, said she was lucky to be able to gather important documents before floodwaters flooded her living room.

Kampung Rawana mosque qariyah chairman Mohd Yusof Rawana said the floodwaters reached as high as the villagers' necks at one point.

"We kept moving our essential items and valuables throughout the night.

"We did not expect the downpour to last so many hours."

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Residents wading through floodwaters in Jalan P. Ramlee early yesterday morning. (Right) A Civil Defence Department lorry rescuing trapped flood victims in Jalan P. Ramlee. Pix by Michael Ong

