

Smart unit sent to help Sabah

WORST FLOODS IN 30

YEARS: Race is on to search and rescue thousands trapped in over 80 villages

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THIRTEEN Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (Smart) members from Putrajaya have been deployed to Beaufort in Sabah to help with search and rescue efforts.

National Security Council secretary of Sabah Rodzi Md Saad said they were also pulling in all forms of logistical resources, such as helicopters, trucks and boats, to help in search and rescue efforts following the flooding in Beaufort and Tenom.

"We have two helicopters from the Royal Malaysian Air Force, 20 boats to be used by the Fire and Rescue Department and trucks to distribute food. There are many agencies, non-governmental organisations, among others who also are helping out.

"At the moment, everything is under control. The weather does look good in Tenom and the six feet of water has receded but it is status quo in Beaufort because flood waters are coming in from different rivers," he said.

Rodzi hoped that people in the affected areas would cooperate with authorities especially in search and rescue, and evacuation efforts.

"We hope people will follow instructions from the rescue officers

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and police at all times," he said.

In **Beaufort**, the 300,000-odd residents remained on high alert.

After a one day reprieve two days ago, rain began pouring again yesterday in Tenom and Keningau.

Residents in the nearby districts of Sipitang and Papar could do little too as many roads were cut off after Sungai Padas broke its banks on Thursday evening, at one point breaching the 10m mark, well above the 8.70m danger level.

Apart from the sight of some people cleaning their shops and residents wading in knee-deep waters and paddling small wooden boats, the town looks deserted with banks closed, and train services suspended between here and Tenom.

Over 2,000 flood victims were evacuated to 17 relief centres. They were among the worst hit after floodwaters engulfed over 80 villages here, the worst ever flooding in more than 30 years.

The race is now on for the authorities and volunteers from non-governmental organisations to reach those trapped in their vil-



Beaufort in Sabah, one of the worst-hit areas, is flooded. The town's 300,000 residents are still on high alert following the floods.

lages after road links to many of the communities were cut off.

Beaufort district officer Mohd Shaid Othman who chairs the district natural disaster committee, said there were those trapped in their homes and efforts were being made to help them.

He said the committee had worked hard to rescue and send them to relief centres.

Fishermen Roslin Jalil, 35 and Mohd Zain Jalil, 26, who paddled two hours from Luagan, a village south of here said they came to see how their relatives were in Bingkul about 2km from the town area.

"We paddled through the floods and it's really bad. It will be quite some time before the water subsides," said Zain, who with Roslin had also helped others move about in the town area using their boat.

Salmiah Dasar in her 60s, from Kg Kinamas, said the water had yet to reach the floor of her home, which was on stilts, but she and her family were cut off.

Salmiah's nephew Jumlah Alano, 21, and his friend Syam Zainal, 24, tied three drums together and put a plywood on top as a makeshift boat to bring her out to the main Kota Kinabalu-Beaufort road where

some shops remained open.

Jihawa Yangchen, 47, said water rose up to her waist in her shop where she sells second-hand clothing.

"The water subsided this morning about 5am and we began cleaning up."

In **Tenom**, water has receded in most villages but about 3,000 villagers remained at 17 relief centres yesterday. More than 500 have been allowed to return home.

In **Keningau**, the flood situation had improved but 224 families remain at three relief centres, said district officer Yusop Othman. **Additional reporting by Kristy Inus**