

'Flood plains nearly wiped out'

DEVELOPMENT RISK:
NGOs urge stricter
action by Penang

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SAHABAT Alam Malaysia (SAM) has rubbished the DAP-led state government's claim that ongoing development would mitigate flash floods in the state.

Its president, SM Mohamed Idris, said yesterday rapid development, which involved hill cutting and natural flood plains being turned into concrete jungles, had contributed to the problem.

"Floods resulting from surface water runoff have increased as many areas become urbanised. Development over the years has caused natural flood plains in Penang to become almost non-existent."

Idris was commenting on state Local Government, Traffic Management and Flood Mitigation Committee chairman Chow Kon Yeow's claim that ongoing development in Penang would mitigate flash floods.

Chow, who ruled out overdevelopment as the cause of flash floods in the state, had instead blamed the problem on unprecedented rainfall due to climate change.

Idris said the number of impervious areas, such as roads, pavement and buildings, had grossly reduced ground area which could absorb excess water naturally.

"The state government has to conduct a comprehensive study on the

ability of the infrastructure to cope with the rate of development."

Over the years, he said, SAM had encountered and highlighted cases of mud floods and floods due to earthworks as well as development on hillslopes.

"Future flood mitigation plans must factor in weather patterns, intensity and frequency of rainfall, and the rise in sea level."

Malaysian Nature Society Penang branch advisor D. Kanda Kumar also blamed the flash floods on overdevelopment, adding that other factors included hill cutting and poor drainage system.

"The authorities must be strict in enforcing laws on indiscriminate hill cutting. There must be a review of the state's drainage system in view of the rapid development."

Unusually-heavy rainfall has caused the water level at the Air



*A man pushing his motorcycle along a **flooded Jalan P. Ramlee** after a **three-hour downpour** in Penang last Friday.*

Itam dam here to be filled almost to the brim.

Penang Water Supply Corporation corporate affairs manager K. Jeyabalan said water level at the dam was at its optimum level or 92 per cent of its total capacity of 2.6 billion litres.

"It is normal for the dam to fill up during monsoon seasons and there are no inherent dangers."

Jeyabalan said some 50 million

litres of water from the dam was quickly processed to avoid it from overflowing, adding that if there was an overflow, excess water would be discharged into Sungai Air Itam.

Despite the heavy downpour, two other dams in the state, in Teluk Bahang and Mengkuang, recorded only 57 per cent and 32 per cent of their total capacities respectively as of yesterday.