

Penampang under water

Residents caught in flash flood as Moyog river bursts its banks

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KOTA KINABALU: Flood waters caught hundreds of residents in Penampang by surprise as the level rose to half a metre within 30 minutes after the Babagon dam siren sounded.

The swollen Moyog river burst its banks almost immediately after the water level at the Babagon dam reached its highest at around 7am, sending a large volume of water through its spillway into the river and inundating nearly 60 villages and hundreds of homes.

More than 100 people were evacuated while firemen, civil defence personnel and volunteers helped ferry schoolchildren as well as patients stranded at a polyclinic to their homes.

There were no casualties or serious incidents, though some landslides were reported close to homes in Kampung Kibabaig as flood waters began to recede by around noon.

Property and livestock damage is expected to run into millions of ringgit.

The Moyog river has been rising over the past few days following heavy rainfall along Sabah's west coast, and the residents believed that when the extra water flowed out of the spillway from the dam, it caused the river to burst its banks.

"It happened so fast, I heard the siren and within 30 minutes the water in my house was ankle-deep," said Hendrietta Lai.

Moyog assemblyman Terence Siambun said that everything on the lower floor of his house was dam-



To higher ground: Firemen evacuating villagers at Kampung Dabak after heavy rain in several parts in Kota Kinabalu.

aged by the sudden deluge.

Also not spared were the district police headquarters, Fire and Rescue Services station, Penampang district office, schools and road links in numerous areas.

"Our immediate task was to save all important documents, exhibits and equipment and also move the 20 detainees to the Kepayan police headquarters lock-up as the water rose to nearly a metre," Penampang police chief Deputy Supt Ratan Singh said.

Penampang district officer William Sampil, who was himself trapped inside his office in the flooded building, said the water was receding and hoped the slightly improved weather condition would hold up.

The floods, he added, were not as bad as those in 1999, when only helicopters could reach stranded people.

Residents along the banks of the Moyog river, who started to see water levels rising at about 1am, took precautions like moving out to stay with families on higher ground.

Those caught by the floods lived further away from the river.

Other low-lying areas in Putatan, Likas, Inanam, Menggatal and Tuaran were also affected, with some graves at a cemetery being exposed by landslips.

By 5pm yesterday, some 128 evacuees had returned to their homes, said Sampil.

"The situation is improving but we are monitoring the Moyog river as the water level is still high," he said.