

Guide: It came fast and furious

Villagers see nature at its worst first hand

KUNDASANG: It was not an earthquake but it was still nature at its worst; boulders as big as houses tumbling down Sg Mesilau turning the river into a raging torrent of water.

As the water swept down, carrying with it millions of logs and fallen trees and slamming them against the base of a bridge, hundreds of people living at the foothills of Mount Kinabalu near the river scurried for safety.

It was sudden and came "fast and furious", said mountain guide Norasram Ramli, 46, who fled his home at Kampung Mesilau as soon as he saw the rushing water.

"It was terrifying. The ground was shaking from the rolling boulders and the water was frothing," he said, describing the Monday afternoon incident.

A mudslide followed, adding to the horror, and damaged four bridges as well as several vegetable farms.

"I jumped into my car and sped away," said Norasram.

He went to the Kundasang com-

munity hall, where more than 100 other villagers had taken refuge.

Another Mesilau resident, who only identified herself as Kamisa, said it felt like someone was drilling underground and causing her wooden house to shake violently.

"I grabbed some clothes and left with my children," she said. She drove to the hall.

She added that some of her neighbours who did not have their own vehicles hitched rides out of the kampung.

The village sits in a ravine between Sungai Mesilau 1 and Sungai Mesilau 2 that join Sg Liwagu further down.

At the Mount Kinabalu Golf Club next to Mesilau 1, where the 20 staff lived with their families in the employee quarters, the homes were also shaking during the torrent.

A staff member, who asked to be identified only as Hamidin, returned to the quarters yesterday with many of the others to collect more of their belongings.

He said they expected the buildings to be washed away if the heavy rains continued there on the eastern side of the mountain.

Aivi Shahira, 18, was carrying clothes and household items from her home as fast as she could before it rained again.

"We need to get our things and leave quickly. I am scared. There could be more mud and more boulders," she said as she ran off.

Kampung Mesilau Village Development and Security Committee chairman Hanin Lasim said the villagers had returned but would evacuate the moment heavy rains start.

The village has more than 100 houses with about 700 residents, most of whom are farmers.

"The people are scared and we are doing everything we can to keep everyone safe," said Hanin.

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