

# New equipment needed for disaster relief

**KUALA LUMPUR:** High-powered boats and all-weather helicopters will be among the new equipment used in future disaster relief operations.

The newly-formed Natural Disaster Management Agency's deputy chairman Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim said the equipment was needed to better manage evacuation of victims.

"The acquisition of the helicopters is separate from the RM170mil allocated to the agency.

"These must be able to ferry 20

passengers and remain airborne for between five and six hours at a stretch," he told reporters at the Parliament lobby yesterday.

At present, helicopters used for such operations come from various departments and agencies, including the private sector, he said.

The agency, headed by the Prime Minister, was formed on Oct 1 to integrate rescue and relief operations by all relevant agencies such as police, fire and rescue, Rela, the army and civil defence.

"Emphasis will be on local

involvement in the operations, by forming committees at community level," he said.

For example, the previous practice of having food storage at district level would be scrapped, he added.

"Instead, food stores will be set up by communities in their respective areas to ensure victims get aid as quickly as possible," he said.

He noted that the agency would also have specific divisions, such as those comprising doctors and engineers.

Pre-flood warning notices would also be issued and these alerts would include dos and don'ts in the event of flooding, as well as contact numbers of rescue personnel, he said.

In the Dewan Rakyat earlier, Shahidan told lawmakers the agency's standard operating procedure would be announced this week.

"We now have a specific agency to manage disaster relief operations that covers land, sea and rivers," he said.