

Floods and slope slides

IT'S a crying shame that we still continue to experience bad flash floods and slope slides all over the country, even as we seek developed nation status by 2020.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar is right in criticising the lax behaviour of the local councils for this sad state of affairs.

The minister has the support of all Malaysians, especially those who regularly suffer from these frequent flash floods and dangerous slope slides. We lose due to the severe damage caused to property, trade and business and the time wasted in traffic jams, indeed our quality of life.

Moreover the hardships experienced by the low income groups who live in flood prone and hilly areas are enormous.

Yet we take it all patiently and suffer from the neglect, indifference, corruption, inefficiency of enforcement authorities and the poor governance of the local councils.

Why should our people continue to suffer? Why should the poor that make up the bottom 40% of our income groups suffer so much? No wonder the social disparity widens and people feel neglected and marginalised. Yet we claim that we care for the poor. Can they believe us or trust the authorities?

One important way to solve these critical problems is to reintroduce elected local councils, which would have to be more honest, responsible and accountable. If they slacken or are lax, they can and should be replaced.

Presently, many local councils almost get away with murder, given the way they abuse financial management, the award and supervision of tenders and contracts and the poor services they provide to the tax and rate payers.



No wonder there is deep trust deficit amongst the *rakyat*. There is no point achieving relatively good economic growth rates and even developed country status, if we cannot prevent, reduce or solve simple flash floods and slope slides.

And then we complain about the deadly dengue disease, which is largely caused by stagnant water.

Rivers, streams and drains are allowed to be clogged with timber from illegal felling of forests and rubbish that is carelessly thrown all over by irresponsible members of the public, who also get away scot-free, because of bad enforcement.

We are a tropical country with high rainfall and should be conscious of the grave need to protect our environment.

The effective enforcement of our environmental rules and reg-

ulations is paramount.

We have to introduce new laws where necessary to prevent frequent flash floods, landslides and mud spills.

But we talk a lot after each sad tragedy or disaster, and forget all about it soon after.

Then we have another bad experience and ponder what went wrong and examine the whys and wherefores.

This cannot go on, except at our own peril.

In conclusion, I hope the Government should seriously consider the vital need to reintroduce elected local councils, and become tougher with the current appointed local council chairman and councillors.

The Government must also take firmer action against the errant public who flout the laws and regulations that seek to protect the environment.

As it is, it is very embarrassing and a crying shame that we have to still face flash floods and slope slides ever so often at the expense of the people and the economy.

If we cannot even reduce flash floods and landslides, we do not deserve to call ourselves a developed nation, even if we achieve that status by simply meeting our economic growth and income per capita targets by 2020.

I am sure the Government can do better to show us that it means business and good governance.

We can only hope and pray that we will not have flooding and sliding slopes in Kuala Lumpur during President Obama's visit and Heads of Government attending the Asean Summit.

TAN SRI RAMON NAVARATNAM
Chairman
Asli Center of Public Policy
Studies