

Heavy rain just a factor in floods

OTHER CONTRIBUTING FACTORS:

Development and poor drainage to blame too, says Met D-G

ALIZA SHAH
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

THE level of rainfall recorded in the Klang Valley and its surrounding area is not unusual and could not have led to a natural disaster without other contributing factors, said the Meteorological Department.

Its director-general, Datuk Che Gayah Ismail, said the amount of rainfall recorded at the department's stations in Petaling Jaya and Subang on Nov 16 and 17 was lower than the highest amount of rainfall per day that the station had recorded in the past.

"On Nov 16, the rainfall recorded at our station in Petaling Jaya was 22mm and in Subang, 94mm.

"On Nov 17, the rainfall in Petaling Jaya was 38.8mm while in Subang, it was 11mm.

"These amounts were normal and below the highest daily rainfall ever recorded in Petaling Jaya, which was 158.6mm on Nov 19, 2006, and 124mm in Subang on Nov 23, 1992," she said.

Downpours, she added, were not the sole factor in flash floods.

"There are other factors, such as the use of land for development and drainage.

"Lentang rainforest, for example, can receive up to 100mm of rain, but it does not flood compared with areas with high development density," she said.

Association of Water and Energy

Research Malaysia president S. Piarapakaran said the common cause of flash floods was sloppy drainage systems in construction sites.

"I have been saying over and over again, as a developing country, we are causing changes to our landscape.

"Today, we have only two-lane highways but tomorrow, we might have four-lane highways.

"So the moment we reduce these permeable surfaces that absorb water, we need to provide some form of mitigation," he said.

Piarapakaran said most of the drains that were built were undersized, causing excessive water to spill during heavy rain.

"We need to have a retention pond to hold the water before it goes into the drains, or we need to enlarge drains so that they can carry more water.

"Even if the drains are properly designed, we can

see a lot of things inside them that clog the water.

"Water moves with energy. If its movement is blocked, it will cause the water to swell and increase its level," he said.

The government, he said, should confer enforcement power on the Department of Irrigation and Drainage (DID) to take action against developers who failed to provide proper drainage in their sites.

"DID does not have enforcement powers.

"They can tell you the technical specifications, which include the



Datuk Che Gayah Ismail



Villagers making their way to safer ground after flash floods hit Kampung Parit Mahang, Kuala Selangor, Selangor, yesterday. Pic by Muhammad Sulaiman

design, whether there is a need to deepen the drain, but they have no power to enforce.

"The power to enforce is with the local authorities, which use whatever technical data prepared by

DID to force the developers to follow the requirement.

"We have been giving (enforcement powers) to the local authorities but they have not taken action.

"Are we willing to wait for a few

more years?"

The authorities, Piarapakaran said, must identify cleared areas that needed deeper drainage to replace the natural absorption function.