

Man swept away by raging river feared drowned

FLOOD WORSENS:
5,362 people in Sarawak evacuated

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THE second wave of floods in Sarawak that wreaked havoc in many districts in the southern part of the state is feared to have claimed its first victim.

Judus Jalina is feared to have drowned when he was ploughing through floodwaters that hit his house in Kampung Maan, Padawan, near here on Saturday.

In the 9pm incident, the 20-year-old victim and his friends were crossing a road inundated by waist-high water when he fell into a river and was swept away by fast-flowing waters.

His friends, who had held on to a tree, could only watch in horror as Judus was swept away.

The victim's relative, who wanted to be known only as Kismia, said the family was in shock when they learned what had happened from other villagers.

"I was helping the family to move some items when I heard the news. I rushed home with the hope that it was not true, but Judus was not around," said the distraught relative.

"Although the chances of Judus being safe are slim, I pray to God that he will be found alive. If it is otherwise, I hope that his body is recovered soonest to give us closure."

State Fire and Rescue Department assistant director (operations) Farhan Sufyan Borhan said a search-and-rescue (SAR) mission with the cooperation of other agencies, in-



Residents of Pekan Batu Kitang evacuated to a relief centre in Kuching yesterday. Pic by Che Rani Che Din

cluding the Civil Defence Department, was launched to locate Judus.

As of 4pm yesterday, Judus could not be located.

The flood, which entered its second day yesterday, worsened with more people being evacuated to relief centres following continuous downpours for the past two days.

State Civil Defence Department (JPAM) public relations officer Siti Huzaimah Ibrahim said 5,362 people from 1,470 families had been relocated as of 6pm yesterday.

This was an increase of more than 4,000 people compared with 486 evacuees who sought shelter at six

evacuation centres the previous day.

"Thirty-one temporary relief centres are in operation in the Kuching, Bau, Kota Samarahan, Padawan and Serian districts," she said.

Schools in the flood-stricken districts were not spared by the wet spell. A state Education Department spokesman said 20 schools in the Bau, Padawan and Serian districts had been inundated as of 5pm yesterday.

"The worse affected school is SK St Teresa Serian (M)," he said, adding that the department had yet to make any decision on the schools affected by the floods.

Six schools in the three districts had been converted into flood evacuation centres.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid said the Sarawak Education Department was keeping tabs on the condition of the schools and would initiate action should the floods worsen.

"The ministry is leaving it to the state Education Department to decide on the operations of schools affected by the floods since they are monitoring the situation on the ground," he said after officiating the state-level National Patriotism Education Convention in Kuching yesterday.