'Development, blocked drains blamed for floods'

'INADEQUATE':
Upgrading of drainage system needed, say experts

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MASSIVE development mushrooming in the city have contributed to the flash floods that hit certain areas here last Thursday.

Malaysian Hydrological Society deputy chairman Datuk Hanapi Mohamad Noor said developments were among the contributing factors for the flash floods in Jalan Pantai Baru, Jalan Bangsar, Jalan Semantan and areas upstream of Sungai Pantai and Sungai Anak Air Batu, which pass through the Universiti Malaya (UM) campus.

"Developments in these areas have contributed to the increasing surface flow runoff, exceeding the capacity of the drainage system built more than 20 years ago.

"You can observe more development taking place in the affected areas, including the Mass Rapid Transit, but no upgrading is done to the drainage system.

"If development involves changing land use from forest to paved surfaces, then when rain falls, the surface flow of water will increase and the speed of water, too, will increase," he said.

Hanapi said the lake at the UM campus, which served as a retention pond for floodwaters, was reportedly silted up, reducing its capacity to store water.

"There is no record that the lake has been desilted. The two rivers passing through the university, Sungai Pantai and Sungai Anak Air Batu, have not been upgraded to cater for increased flow due to upstream development."

He suggested that developers should prepare an erosion and sedimentation control plan, which would minimise such problems.

"The purpose of the control plan is to establish which measures prevent erosion and offsite sedimentation.

"The plan should serve as a blueprint for the location, installation and maintenance practices to control anticipated erosion and prevent sediments from leaving development sites," he said, adding that the plan was important for development on slopes.

Datuk Hanapi Mohamad Noor

He said developers needed to ensure that river and drainage capacity was sufficient to accommodate excess water.

If not, there would be a need to upgrade rivers and drainage systems, he said.

"For low-lying areas, pump-drain systems need to be considered to pump floodwaters into rivers and main drains.

"Records of Sungai Klang water levels by the Irrigation and Drainage Department showed that the water level on May 12 was below warning level and was able to accommodate extra water from the affected areas."

Institution of Engineers Malaysia chairman Ellias Saidin said the floods could have been caused by blockages in the drainage system from sediment build-up and rubbish.

"If the drains are inadequate, upgrading should be carried out. I believe that flood-prone areas have long been identified and the drainage systems will need to be upgraded over the years," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Ellias said the lack of maintenance and enforcement by the authorities could have been one of the factors.

"The authorities have to step up their scheduled maintenance. The rubbish causing the blockages is thrown by people and enforcement has to be more stringent."

He rejected any suggestion that corruption was a factor in the issue.

"Storm water drainage design is carried out by competent professional engineers in accordance with guidelines and codes of practice.

"Erosion and sedimentation control is practised, with sedimentation traps and control measures installed in major projects in the city."