

# Role in flood prevention

I THINK Malaysians these days are no longer surprised by news about floods. Since the last decade, our country has suffered a series of floods with the most serious hitting the east coast of the peninsula at the end of 2014 and early 2015. In that episode which was described as the worst in decades, up to 200,000 people were affected and 21 killed, and it took more than a year for flood victims in certain states to recover and return to their normal lives.

The geographical position of Malaysia makes it experience two monsoon winds seasons annually, the southwest monsoon and north-east monsoon. The latter brings more rain resulting in regular floods every year.

Knowing this raises some questions. What have the authorities done to prevent flooding? Are the floods unavoidable? Do we have a proper flood mitigation system? Who is to be blamed when floods occur? Have the citizens themselves done enough in flood prevention efforts?

And how about flash floods? Do we pay any attention when they occur? Although flash floods only last for a short period of time, the damage can be very significant.

In the past two months, Klang, Shah Alam and Teluk Bahang have each experienced flash floods. It was reported that the flood in Klang occurred after two hours of heavy rain, leading the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) officials to manually open the water gate at Jalan Banting in Pandamaran to reduce the flood water level.

The same thing happened at Shah Alam where, after two hours of heavy rain, the residential area of Seri Muda was flooded.

In Teluk Bahang, apart from the heavy rain, several other factors could have contributed to the flash flood. Officials from the Fire and Rescue Department and Balik Pulau MP Datuk Seri Dr Hilmi Yahaya have both attributed it to the poor drainage system in Sungai Teluk Bahang.



The flash flood at Teluk Bahang was regarded as the worst flooding in years in Penang. It also affected the Penang International Airport (*pic*) with water reaching the arrival hall.

The reasons for the flash flood in these three different places are still being investigated but we can assume that the main factor is the poor and outdated drainage system which is simply not good enough to withstand sudden heavy downpours especially in urban areas.

Flash flood occurs when excessive water fills the land in a short period of time. It usually happens with little or no warning and the destruction it wreaks combined with its exceptional speed and unpredictability makes it dangerous.

Fortunately, preventive measures for floods and flash floods are basically the same. The Government set up several flood control mea-

asures following the great flood in 1971. The Natural Disaster Relief Committee was established in 1972 to coordinate flood relief operations at national, state and district levels with the main aim being to prevent loss of human lives and to reduce damage to property.

But citizens should not be too dependent on the Government's flood prevention efforts. Despite facing floods every year, the mentality of most Malaysians remains unchanged. Environmental awareness remains low and rivers are still polluted.

Although we cannot change the natural causes of the flood, we should do everything we can to control the man-made causes.

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