

River confluence caused worst floods

Most of badly hit Kelantan towns were located in valleys where rivers meet, says expert

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KUALA LUMPUR: Many of the towns worst hit by floods last year such as Kuala Krai in Kelantan are located in valley areas where rivers meet.

Dr Edlic Sathiamurthy of Universiti Malaysia Terengganu said these towns saw flood waters come from two bodies into one, swamping people there.

"Dabong, Temerloh and Kuala Krai, these are in areas of river confluence.

"These are areas where usually two water bodies meet, bringing an accumulation of flood flow," he said

at a workshop on the floods yesterday.

Some areas such as Kuala Krai, he said, also had depressed topographies (or lower landscapes), making them prone to floods.

Referring to Kelantan's past rainfall data, he warned that massive floods may happen again, adding that there was a "pattern".

In 1967, 38 people died and 537,000 people were displaced in Kelantan's massive floods then.

He said China and the United States destroyed their levees (or embankments) at less "sensitive" areas in dealing with floods, so waters could overflow there instead

of hitting the towns.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's Prof Dr Zulkifli Yusop said the Drainage and Irrigation Department had done a study to look into building a dam upstream of Dabong.

"This is a flood mitigation dam but it must have a multi-purpose function for water resources, aquaculture and floods," he said.

Meteorological Department spokesman Dr Hisham Mohd Anip confirmed there was a "blind spot" in weather detection over Cameron Highlands and Gua Musang.

Although there were already six radars covering the peninsula, he mooted the idea of building another

one for this region.

He also revealed that Typhoon Hagupit (Dec 1 to Dec 12), the worst cyclone to hit the Philippines last year, helped to reduce the massive rainfall over Malaysia then.

This was because the typhoon drew a portion of the cold air from the north of the world away from the monsoon storms here, he said.

"If there was no Hagupit, we would have had (heavy) rain for more than three weeks instead of two (over December)," he said.

He said the department was trying to update its forecasting models.

He admitted that some years might be needed before they were

properly equipped to forecast, adding that even the United States had similar problems in getting things accurate.

National Hydraulic Research Institute of Malaysia senior researcher Marini Ideris said land use contributed to the floods in Kelantan.

Later, when asked to elaborate, she said that the findings were still preliminary and needed more research.

Though many factors led to the floods last year, it is widely agreed that an extreme rainfall of over 1,500mm in December last year led to many areas being submerged under several metres of water.

Dedicated agency to manage natural disasters

PUTRAJAYA: A dedicated agency in charge of natural disasters will be formed to manage all related aspects, including evacuation and rescue efforts.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said the Government was keen to have one, similar to those in the United States, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines.

"These countries face natural disasters quite frequently so we are looking at their model.

"We will study what suits us best especially in handling all things caused by floods," he told a press

conference after chairing a special meeting on post-flood action plan here yesterday.

Presently, matters related to natural disasters are dealt by the National Security Council (NSC). Its role is often only seen as a coordinator among various agencies including the Fire and Rescue Department, Civil Defence Department and district offices.

Muhyiddin, who is also the National Disaster Management Committee chairman, said the new body would be in the form of either an agency or a department.

"That will be decided later but the

Government felt that there should be a dedicated agency managing natural disasters. Obviously the NSC, under its present scope, cannot continue to manage disasters," he said, noting that the NSC had served its purpose for many years.

Muhyiddin said the study would take some time.

On the RM500 aid to recent flood victims, Muhyiddin said 77,000 more households could expect to receive the money by next week.

"Most of them are victims in Kelantan," he said, adding that 33,000 households had so far received the financial aid.



Decision making: Muhyiddin chairing the meeting at Perdana Putra. With him are Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri G. Palanivel (left) and NSC secretary Datuk Mohamed Thajudeen Abdul Wahab. — Bernama