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FLOODS

BAD WEATHER TO CONTINUE UNTIL APRIL

Number of evacuees in Pahang, Johor remains high

KUALA LUMPUR

THERE will be no reprieve from the weather, at least until April, as the Meteorological Department expects constant rainfall in April due to changes in the monsoon season.

Its director-general, Datuk Che Gayah Ismail, said the northeast monsoon season was expected to continue until March.

"The northeast wind will be strong and continuous heavy rain will cause floods in the peninsula's east coast and west Sarawak.

"In April and May, the country will enter a transitional phase of monsoon, which could see rainy weather and thunderstorms in the afternoon and evening, especially in the peninsula's west coast and Sarawak's interior."

However, she said less rainfall could be expected in May and June during the southwest monsoon.

The number of flood victims in Pahang and Johor remained the highest among the six states affected.

In Segamat, floods claimed the first two victims yesterday when the bodies of a 21-year-old man and a plantation worker were recovered.

Mohd Fais Syafiq Hassan's body was found by rescuers floating in 3m-deep water, 10m from where he went

missing when the boat he was on with four other people capsized on Tuesday.

The other casualty was plantation worker Tarmin Katimin, 58, whose body was recovered in Palong Timur, Segamat at 3.15pm yesterday.

Bandar Putra Fire and Rescue Station senior officer Mohd Aizad Mamat said Tarmin's body was found a day after he was swept away by floodwaters while riding his motorcycle.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, who visited victims at Sekolah Agama Kampung Jawa here said the armed forces have set up a field hospital in SK Kampung Jawa here.

"Army medical teams are deployed to Rantau Panjang, Kelantan, and two other areas here. This is part of the armed forces' assistance for flood relief following the deployment of 6,000 armed forces personnel nationwide, including 1,500 in Johor."

Hishammuddin said the armed forces would collaborate with National Service Alumni Brigade members and non-governmental organisations to repair houses and bridges that were damaged in the floods.

At 6pm yesterday, 6,954 flood victims from 1,993 families remained in 63 relief centres in four districts in Johor.

In Kuantan, the Chinese community in Sungai Lembing raced against time to clean up their houses and shops covered in mud, ahead of tonight's Chinese New Year reunion dinner.

Ho Seng Kuen, 82, said: "I was able to move some food and small elec-

trical items to the upper floor of the house. The reunion dinner is tonight, but look at the amount of work to clear out all the dirt," he said.

As at 4pm yesterday, 7,083 flood victims from 1,845 families sought shelter at 97 relief centres in nine districts in Pahang, with Lipis and Kuantan the worst-hit districts.

In Kota Baru, Low Chong Peng and his family's plans for a grand reunion dinner and celebration were destroyed when their belongings were washed away by the floods.

The 63-year-old from Kampung Sungai Limau, Peringat, said new clothes, prayer items, boxes of mandarin oranges and a new cupboard were either damaged or swept away.

"Normally, the floods don't leave such a bad effect in the village, but this year is particularly bad," he said.

In Kuching, 19 longhouses in three districts are on alert.

As at 2pm yesterday, there was no evacuation at the affected areas in



Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein with flood victims in Segamat, Johor, yesterday. PIC BY ADI SAFRI

the districts of Marudi, Niah and Beluru.

Sarawak Disaster Management Committee Secretariat chief Maj Ismail Mahedin said there were 3,636 residents at all longhouses in the affected areas.

In Pitas, Sabah, four villages that were inaccessible can now be reached via road, while meals for another four villages are still being delivered via air.

Sabah Civil Defence director Colonel Muliadi Al-Hamdi Ladin said the situation was better yesterday compared with Wednesday when access to 396 families was cut off.

In Setiawan, Perak Menteri Besar

Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Ab Kadir said the state government was mulling relocating residents who lived in flood-prone areas.

He said that he had instructed the Irrigation and Drainage Department to come up with suggestions to overcome a spate of flooding incidents.

Zambry said residents of Kampung Padang Serai had been living in houses inundated by floodwaters for almost three months.

"The flood has yet to fully subside until today (yesterday) as their houses are located in a low-lying area," he said, adding that the state government would help to ease the burden of the flood victims.

THRILL SEEKERS

'Monsoon tourism' at Taman Negara

JERANTUT: Some foreign tourists are staying on to experience the heavy rains and floods brought on by the monsoon season in Taman Negara here.

Veteran tour guide Hamzah Abdul Majid said this was a new trend that was picking up at the park.

"Taman Negara is a suitable destination for those who seek such a thrill. At the same time, the locals need not worry so much about their livelihood being affected during the rainy season," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Hamzah said the authorities should use their discretion when it came to advising tourists to leave Taman Negara.

"Tourists should be allowed to stay if they choose to do so, provided they do not venture into Taman Negara without permission from the National Parks and Wildlife Department.

"They should not be forced to leave, otherwise they will tell their family and friends not to visit Taman Negara during the monsoon season, which lasts about three months."

Hamzah said after severe floods in 2014, the livelihoods of the tour



Firemen assisting Taman Negara tourists in Jerantut, Pahang, yesterday. PIC COURTESY OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE DEPARTMENT

guides in Kuala Tahan were affected for almost three months.

Hamzah said this was due to inaccurate news reports which exaggerated the extent of the flood damage in Taman Negara.

Environmentalist Andrew Sebastian said tourism industry players were faced with the predicament of striking a balance between catering to the demands and expectations of tourists while ensuring their safety.

"The safety of tourists should be top priority. On the other hand, the monsoon season is an opportunity to develop creative tourism products."

said Andrew, who is also the chief executive officer for Ecotourism and Conservation Society Malaysia.

Yesterday, Jerantut Fire and Rescue Department senior officer Shahrin Yusmar Mat Yusof said resort owners in Kuala Tahan have been reminded to advise their guests to vacate the premises before floods.

"As some have chosen to remain, our men have been visiting them to provide advice and safety tips in case the situation worsens."

"Those who wished to leave were told to contact the department so that they can find their way out because some of the routes are closed."