



## KERATAN AKHBAR

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## Calibrate economic costs

### Integrate structural and non-structural measures

**T**HE floods are here again — the oft-repeated mantra in Terengganu, Kelantan and Pahang — when the annual monsoon rain occurs between year-end and the early weeks of the new year.

Reports of town residents and villagers being cut off by floods are the norm, and so is the damage done. The east coast folks may be prescient about floods, given past patterns. “The floods are scary, but they happen every year that some of us have grown accustomed to them,” says a flood victim.

This rainy season has seen some 3,000 evacuees at flood relief centres in Kelantan and Terengganu. The death toll is at three, the NST reported.

Have we become numb, or uncaring for flood victims? We have a general idea of their torment — first escaping ominous floods before they threaten lives. Then roughing it out at relief centres. In fact, floods have become more intense with each passing year. Costs to manage them have increased four-fold, from RM1.79 billion in 2001 to RM5.81 billion in 2010, according to the National Disaster Management Agency.

In the December 2014 and January 2015 floods, one of the worst in the last decades, losses were reported to be some RM280 million. Most affected were Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan. The floods ravaged about 190,000ha of oil palm plantations. More than 230,000 people were evacuated with 21 killed. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said between 500,000 and one million people were affected.

Malaysia certainly cannot afford another flood disaster of such magnitude — the damage to highways, hospitals, universities and schools would be unspeakable. Flood victims in Kelantan and Terengganu continued to have food shortages, electricity and

clean water months after the 2014-15 floods ended. And just as they were about to breathe again, they had to face another round of floods at the end of the year.

This Leader believes economic costs should be better calibrated. Instead of spending millions, come up with comprehensive measures. Datuk Dr Norma Mansor, president of the Malaysian Economics Association, suggests better coordination between agencies at the federal, state and district levels in disaster management planning. And greater emphasis on emergency response. She says there’s a lack of planning on the long-term recovery process, which affects victims’ quality of life.

Perhaps the RM443.9 million and RM150 million allocation announced in the 2020 Budget for flood mitigation and maintenance, respectively, should include planning and sustainable recovery management? A comprehensive approach would be incorporating structural, as well as non-structural measures, such as integrating natural and man-made infrastructure to prevent rivers from overflowing. Nature-based solutions work better if included in risk reduction planning.

Surely, this is not too costly and difficult to implement? After all, Malaysia’s mitigation efforts have earned much praise from international water management and environmental experts, who lauded projects such as the Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel (SMART). The Drainage and Irrigation Department, too, has done its fair share such as erecting bunds and canals to overcome flooding.

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