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Johor MB under fire for being away

Office insists he was aware of the flood situation during his visit to the Middle East

JOHOR BARU: Menteri Besar Datuk Dr Sahrudin Jamal has defended his working visit to the Middle East after he was criticised for being away as thousands of Orang Asli were cut off by floods in Mersing.

His office issued a statement saying that the visit to Jordan and Egypt, with a delegation from the Johor Islamic Religious Council (MAIN), was to foster closer ties between universities in the countries – including University Al-Azhar in Egypt – with the state's religious education institution (Kolej Pengajian Islam Johor or Marsa) – with the trip planned long before the state was hit by floods.

"The menteri besar had visited the temporary shelters in several districts as well as conducted an air check with Johor Fire and Rescue Department director Datuk Yahaya Madais.

"The state and district level Disaster Management Committee Secretariat has ensured that all public needs are available while providing continued information on the flood situation here to the menteri besar," the statement said.

Among those who slammed Dr Sahrudin was Umno vice-president and former Johor menteri besar Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin, who said it was crucial for state leaders to go down to the ground and help the people as much as they could during such times.

Although floods in Johor have started to recede, about 1,000 Orang Asli are still cut off as access roads to their villages in Mersing were inundated, affecting villages such as Kampung Pera, Kampung Punan, Kampung Tewowoh,



A total loss: Farmer Norisham Man, 44, distraught over his water-logged padi field in Kampung Kurnia, Rompin. Heavy rain over the last four days destroyed not only his young crop but many other fields in the village. – Bernama

Kampung Orang Asli Tanah Abang and Kampung Orang Asli Tanjung Tuan.

"All the villages in the area have been cut off since Dec 14 and the only way of communication is via amateur radio," said Mersing Fire and Rescue Station chief Mohd Azhari Awi when met at the station here yesterday.

Three days ago, Mohd Azhari said two men, one with high blood pressure and the other with high fever,

were brought out of Kampung Pera to receive treatment at Kluang Hospital.

"We took an hour and a half using a boat to get to the village which was located about 20km away," he said.

He added that the operation was also assisted by Malaysian Armed Forces personnel.

Elsewhere, the total number of flood victims in the state has dropped slightly, with 2,669 people from 716

families in shelters at 8am yesterday, down from 2,687 people from 722 families at 8pm Wednesday.

In a statement, state Local Government, Urban Wellbeing and Environment Committee chairman Tan Chen Choon said the number of temporary relief centres in operation remained at 43 in all six affected districts.

"The highest number of victims are in Mersing with 806, followed by Kluang (576) and Segamat (536).

"The other flooded districts are Kota Tinggi (457), Pontian (187) and Batu Pahat (108)," he said.

Tan also said that all three roads in Kota Tinggi and two roads in Mersing that were previously closed have been reopened for road users; these are Jalan Lok Heng-Mawai, Jalan Feida Aping Timur, Jalan Mawai Lama, (Kota Tinggi), Jalan Teluk Arong, and Jalan Tanah Abang-jalan Mersing Endau (Mersing).