

30 AUG 1996

LEAD ALL Mudslide

FIFTEEN DIE IN MUDSLIDE AT ORANG ASLI VILLAGE, 40 STILL MISSING

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- Fifteen people were killed and about 40 others are feared missing in a mudslide at the Pos Dipang Orang Asli settlement near Kampar in Perak.

Half of those missing in the tragedy which occurred at about 6.30pm yesterday are children.

The search and rescue operation at the settlement, which is near Kampung Sahum, was suspended at 7.45 tonight and will resume at dawn.

Rescuers, however, fear that those missing may have been swept by the strong current at Sungai Periah Sahum, which overflowed and destroyed 21 Orang Asli houses and one belonging to a Chinese family.

The latest body recovered was that of an Orang Asli child identified as Rudin a/l Balong and it taken to the Kampar Hospital at 10pm today.

The dead -- 14 Orang Asli and one person of Chinese origin -- comprised six men, five women and four children including a baby.

The bodies were sent to Kampar Hospital for post-mortem and 11 of them had been claimed by their respective families to for a mass burial near Pos Dipang.

Six of the survivors suffered injuries and were admitted to the Tapah Hospital. Three of them, who are from the same family, have been discharged.

Kinta district officer Mohd Yusop Yahya said about 40 persons, mostly Orang Asli, were feared missing after the mudslide which followed heavy rain over the past few days.

Perak Menteri Besar Tan Sri Ramli Ngah Talib, who visited the settlement earlier today, said 31 Orang Asli and six persons of Chinese origin were confirmed missing.

A total of 289 rescuers drawn from the Kinta district office, Fire Department, police, army, Department of Orang Asli Affairs, Welfare Department, Public Works Department and the Drainage and Irrigation Department have been mobilised for the search operation.

An operation centre had been set up at Kampung Sahom and another five km away at Pos Dipang.

Yesterday's mudslide is considered the worst such incident in the country after a similar tragedy at the Genting Highlands slip road on June 30 last year in which 22 people died and 23 others were injured.

Mohd Yusop said about 800 residents in the Orang Asli settlement were affected by the mudslide.

He said that out of the 100 houses in the settlement, 30 were destroyed and 20 more damaged.

He said the disaster was triggered by heavy rain that sent a torrent of water and mud down on to the houses.

According to survivors of the mudslide, they hears a loud noise before it started flooding as if a dam had burst.

One survivor, Rizam a/l Bah Kupang, 23, described his experience as a nightmare.

He said he was pushing his motorcycle in front of his house when he saw his neighbour's house being swept by the torrents of mud.

"I called out to all the people in my house to vacate," he said from his hospital bed.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government will investigate the cause of the mudslide.

However, he dismissed the possibility that the disaster was caused by construction work in the area.

Speaking in Kota Kinabalu, he said the government would provide relief aid to the victims of the disaster and their families.

Pos Dipang is among the largest Orang Asli settlements in Perak and had about 1,500 people. It is located on a site about 200 metres above sea level.

Perak state executive councillor Datuk Ong Ka Chuan said about 100 families lived at the settlement and 30 of them had their houses destroyed in the incident.

He said the state government would assist in the reconstruction of the Pos Dipang settlement. -- BERNAMA

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