

30 DEC 1996

Storm-Mohamed

SEARCH FOR STORM VICTIMS TO CONTINUE INDEFINITELY

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 30 (Bernama) -- Search and rescue operations for victims of tropical storm Greg which hit Sabah last Thursday will continue until everyone reported missing is found.

National Natural Disaster Relief Committee chairman Datuk Mohamed Rahmat said that as of 8am today, 163 people had been confirmed dead while 104 were still missing.

A total of 2,014 victims are being housed at evacuation centres in Keningau, Kota Kinablu, Beaufort and Tenom, he told reporters after accompanying Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the prime minister's new year message recording at Angkasapuri here.

Mohamed said search operations could take a long time if bodies were covered by mud or swept far away by river currents.

"There had been cases of search teams recovering bodies about 40km from the scene of the incident" he said.

Mohamed, who is the Information Minister, said he has directed Sabah police to use tracker dogs to facilitate the search.

He said the Sabah government has been asked to provide burial sites as relatives of the dead victims from southern Sulawesi wish to have the bodies buried in Keningau rather than have them sent to the Indonesian island.

Asked if the Indonesian government had provided any assistance considering that most of the victims are Indonesians, he said: "Not yet."

It is understood that the Japanese government will hand over US\$100,000 (RM250,000) to the Sabah government today, in addition to its previous donation of 2,250 blankets and 90 camps, Mohamed said.

He said the federal government has so far donated RM100,000 from the natural disasters fund and would contribute more.

On aid to individual victims, he said the Welfare Services Department is working out the losses suffered by each of them.

Meanwhile, after Dr Mahathir finished his recording today, he received a new year greetings card from the children of Information Ministry staff.

-- BERNAMA

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