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Mahathir-Logging

NO ILLEGAL LOGGING IN KENINGAU- DR MAHATHIR

KOTA KINABALU, Jan 4 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there is no illegal logging in the forest reserve area in Keningau.

Logging was earlier thought to be one of the causes for floods in the Keningau district after the tropical storm Greg struck the Sabah West Coast on Dec 26.

"The claim that the storm and floods were caused by logging be it legal or illegal is unfounded. From my own observation of the area and video clips there is no logging in the Crocker Range. However there were many landslides," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this at a news conference before returning to Kuala Lumpur after inspecting the flood damaged areas in the Keningau district today.

The Prime Minister said the landslides were caused by shifting cultivation and this contributed to the flash floods which drowned many villages causing close to 200 people to lose their lives.

Dr Mahathir said the slash and burn habit for hill padi cultivation had caused many landslides.

"The Keningau area has many steep slopes and the many landslides occurred at very steep slopes. Mud from these landslides had blocked rivers and when too much water was collected, the blocks gave away and floods occurred," he said.

The ensuing river waters dragged along trees and houses built on their banks and on stilts over the rivers, he added.

The Prime Minister said such tragedies were likely to occur in the future when there were floods if the problem of riverine and water settlements (kampung air) was not resolved.

On shifting cultivation, which was still practised in parts of Sabah and Sarawak, he said this was unhealthy as it caused the clearing and burning of all vegetation in an area.

He said in the two states, many hilly areas were devoid of vegetation and were just left barren after the soils were no longer fertile and landslips easily occurred on such soil.

"I am amazed as to how these people can climb up slopes reaching up to 3,000 to 4,000 feet (914.4 to 1,219.2 metres) and build houses on top of the hills and stay there," Dr Mahathir said.

"We want them in places where the government can help them to undertake organised agriculture," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said landslides could also occur in areas where there was no such shifting cultivation. -- BERNAMA

KG JS AAM