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Developers alone not to blame for KL floods

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FOR those who experienced the great floods that hit Kuala Lumpur in 1971, last Friday's flooding of the city was like deja vu. A three-hour torrent reduced the city's well-constructed thoroughfares into Venetian-style canals and brought the city to a standstill in a scenario reminiscent of the '71 floods.

Granted, this time around, the water receded after a few hours, while three decades ago, they remained for a whole week, but the situation is a painful reminder that despite all our efforts to build a world-class city with world-class amenities, our flood prevention measures are woefully inadequate.

Much of the blame has been put on the poor design of development projects, with no less a personage than Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad citing this as a major cause for the city's recurring flood problem. While this may true to some extent, the question that arises is whether developers are solely to be blamed.

Understandably, Real Estate and Housing Developers' Association president Datuk Eddy Chen Lok Loi does not agree.

"It is very convenient to blame developers for the floods in the Klang Valley and we are not denying that some developers do contribute to the problem as they do not maintain their silt traps or retention ponds. However, the issue that needs to be looked into is the whole scenario in the Klang Valley," he said.

Chen said the floods were caused by other factors and not just development in the Klang Valley. He said that the problem of flooding had existed for a long time and even before increasing development, there had been serious flooding in the area, as evidenced by the big flood of Kuala Lumpur in 1971.

He added that last year, developers had only built some 700 units of housing in the Klang Valley and this does not make them responsible for the floods.

A property consultant has called for a thorough review of the city's drainage and sewerage system as well as a study to be conducted on the impact of infrastructure work on the flooding problem.

"The problem of flooding is older than many of us who live in the city. While we are granting approvals to build, what have we been doing about the surrounding drainage system for each project? We can blame the developers, but what about the authorities who grant approvals without studying whether the existing infrastructure can support the future demands of the development?" he questioned.

He said besides poor planning and improper drainage, another reason for the flooding was the inadequate enforcement and lack of maintenance culture by the authorities.

He said instead of seeking parties to blame for the continuous flooding in the city, the authorities should take the proactive stance of addressing its drainage system for which a budget of RM72 million had been allocated.

KL Datuk Bandar Tan Sri Kamaruzzaman Shariff refuted suggestions that City Hall's maintenance of the drainage system was the reason for recurring floods in the city. He stressed that City Hall had never ignored the problem of flash floods and said no one was to blame for last week's catastrophe as it was caused by a natural phenomenon.

Kamaruzzaman said the fact that water level receded within an hour was proof that the city's drainage system was sound and well-maintained and not the cause of the problem.

"The best thing for us to do is to persevere with the ongoing flood mitigation measures," he added.

He said a short term solution to the flooding would be to build two retention ponds that could accommodate large volumes of water in Segambut. He added that City Hall and the Drainage and Irrigation Department are working hand-in-hand to combat the problem by widening and deepening the rivers where possible.

Meanwhile, in Selangor, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo said the state government would work with Kuala Lumpur on remedial measures and flood mitigation projects to put an end to flood woes as the state's drainage system is linked with that of the city.

Dr Mohd Khir attributed the flooding to the irresponsible attitude of Malaysians who throw rubbish into drains and rivers.

"If people do not change their attitude, then the problem of flooding will continue. When the drains are clogged with rubbish, the water gets stagnant and this causes the overflow," he commented.

He said squatters who live along monsoon drains and rivers also contributed to the flood problem because of their unhygienic ways of dumping rubbish either near the drains and rivers or into them. He added that the Selangor government is concerned about the flooding in KL because the state's drainage system is linked with that of the city.

Deputy Minister of Housing and Local Government Datuk Peter Chin said under the Storm Water Management programme, holding ponds would be created near river mouths to contain water overflow and retard water movement to other areas. He added that drain design concepts would also be upgraded to ensure rainwater would seep into storm drains and be discharged quickly.

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