

PM: Mudslide tragedy worse than expected

By NORMAN ONG

PULAI: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who inspected the site of the mudslide tragedy in Gunung Pulai here, yesterday, described what he saw as "devastating, worse than what I expected."

Together with Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Dr Mahathir spent about 45 minutes to see the extent of the destruction caused by the mudslide that occurred at 11pm on Dec 27.

He checked the heap of tree trunks piled several metres high at a bridge after they were brought down from the upper ridges by the force of the mudslide.

He also saw what used to be the living room of Fatimah Sardan, 60, a disabled woman who was killed along with three others - a mother and

her three children aged between one and six.

Dr Mahathir, who also extended personal donations to the 10 families affected by the mudslide, said efforts were being made to find out what had actually happened, as the country did not undergo such an experience before.

He urged everyone to clean up the place and make the rivers flow again, adding that the Government would assist Johor in its flood prevention plans.

"I visited the place because the situation was worse than I expected. The reports in the newspapers and other sources did not reflect the actual disaster. I felt very sad when I saw the impact caused by the devastating mudslide. I have never seen such floods in Malaysia.

"Now, we have to ensure that all the rivers are flowing,

so that there would be no more flooding," he said after being briefed on the floods of Dec 27 and 28 at Pulai Spring Resort.

State secretary Datuk Ayub Mion had said earlier that the floods in Johor Baru and Pontian were caused by continuous rains coupled with

high tide for three days around Dec 27.

He said an unusual weather phenomenon occurred in Pontian caused by a tropical storm and low *depression, resulting in the entire state registering "incredibly" high amount of rain.

He said other causes of the floods, which were among the worse in recent years, were rivers becoming shallow and rubbish collection in rivers.

Ayub said the floods destroyed bridges, livestock, and crops while schools and clinics were submerged.