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PM shocked at extent of mudslide damage, promises help

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JOHOR BARU, Tues. - The Prime Minister, expressing shock at the extent of the damage caused by the mudslide in Gunung Pulai, said both the State and Federal Governments will provide assistance to the victims.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad also told the State Government to take all necessary measures to prevent a recurrence.

He spent almost an hour at Kampung Seri Gunung Pulai near Pontian where five people were killed when a mudslide swept away four houses on Dec 27.

Dr Mahathir said the situation was worse than he thought. "The media and other reports did not give an accurate picture of the situation. I am actually quite surprised to see the devastation left behind."

Dr Mahathir attended a briefing on the recent floods by State Secretary Datuk Ayub Mion at the Pulai Spring Resort. He had taken a half-hour aerial tour of the affected area in an army helicopter earlier.

Dr Mahathir said the authorities also needed, from now on, to make sure all sewerage system and waterways were clear of obstacles that could cause a repeat of the devastating floods.

"I have never seen such a devastating flood as this in Malaysia. What we need to do now is to clean up the area and make sure the waterways (are cleared) to prevent this from happening again.

"But the priority of the rehabilitation process in flood hit areas should be on lending assistance to the people who suffered property loss."

Asked about the allocation to assist flood victims, Dr Mahathir said the State Government had been providing the necessary help, especially to those who needed immediate assistance.

"Our priority is the people. We need to provide assistance to those facing problems; children who need clothing and books.

"As it was in Pahang, we have given the necessary monetary assistance. In fact, we have already approved additional allocation for this purpose."

Earlier, during his visit to the village, Dr Mahathir spent about 45 minutes touring the site of the mudslide, including trekking up nearby high ground for a better view of the place.

He was accompanied by wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman, Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Seri Ong Ka Ting and State Exco members.

Dr Mahathir later spent another half an hour with the survivors of the tragedy and handed a personal contribution to them.

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