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Proposed tunnel to ease flood, traffic woes

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Storm Water Management and Road Tunnel (Smart) to alleviate the flood problem in Kuala Lumpur will be a mammoth dual-function project, as it will help ease traffic congestion as well, Department of Irrigation and Drainage director-general Datuk Keizrul Abdullah said today.

He said apart from acting as a "diversion road" for storm water from upstream areas of Sungai Klang during heavy rains, the tunnels could be utilised for other purposes.

"Originally, it was either we build a 'second river' for the rainwater or channel it into a tunnel. However, this tunnel would only be operational a few times in a year during very heavy rains. We then looked at the possibility of using the tunnel for other purposes," he said when contacted today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday the tunnel was among the measures studied by the Government to overcome the problem of flash floods in the capital.

He had said the move had started with the construction of smart tunnels near the Sungai Besi airport.

Keizrul said DID, which is handling the Smart project, was preparing all final details of the tunnel to present to the Cabinet.

Although various aspects of the project was still being negotiated, he said, the Government had approved the concept and several constructions had begun early this year.

It was reported in January that MMC Engineering and partner Gamuda Bhd landed the "RM2 billion" flood control project to build integrated bypass tunnel-cum-motorway.

It is said the Smart tunnel will be around 11km to 14km long, and include the construction of holding basins or retention ponds.

MMCEG-GAMUDA JV Smart Project deputy general manager Ahmad Razlan Amir Hamzah said today the tunnel would allow storm water to run from a route from Sungai Klang to Kampung Pandan and then to Sungai Besi.

After that it will flow to Desa Waterpark, which will act as a retention area in case Sungai Kerayong, "the next and last stop", is itself filled up.

He said this would help ease the flooding problem for flood-prone areas like Masjid Jamek in the city centre.

Currently construction concentrated on building the storm water section of the tunnel, he said, before proceeding to building the decks for traffic.

It is understood there will be two decks for traffic and a lower section for the flow of water, with gates constructed at the beginning and end of the tunnels.

During heavy rains, the gates will be closed to traffic and all sections can then be used for the flow of storm water.

"However, only a certain length will be used for traffic, from Kampung Pandan to Sungai Besi Highway. It is estimated that motorists will be able to use the tunnel most of the time," he said, adding that the three-year project is expected to be completed by 2006.

Flash floods had hit Kuala Lumpur and its surrounding areas during a three-hour downpour on Tuesday which started at 4pm, crippling traffic flow and the public transport system.

In addition to widespread damage to property and vehicles, the floods also claimed two lives: a 60-year old man who was trapped in his house in Taman Desa, Jalan Klang Lama, and a 50-year-old man who fell into a hole filled with water, also in Jalan Klang Lama.

Meanwhile at Dataran Merdeka, many owners of cars waited outside to see if their vehicles could be removed from the underground Plaza Putra and Royal Selangor Club basement carpark, which were submerged in up to nine feet of water on Tuesday.

Around 50 cars have been removed and carpark operators say about 40 to 50 cars remain inside.

Carpark staff were seen checking on cars today and pumping water out of the area. At Press time today most of the water had been pumped out but layers of mud still remained.