

Najib: Floods in Kelantan a 'major disaster'

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has described the severe floods faced by Kelantan as a "major disaster" which has brought much destruction.

Najib, who observed the effects caused by the major floods in Gua Musang and Kuala Krai today, said the two districts concerned were the worst hit areas this time.

"They (residents) consider the disaster not as a flood phenomenon, but a major catastrophe because the water level rose so high and rapidly to the extent that many houses were submerged," he said at a press conference at the Sultan Ismail Petra Airport, Pengkalan Chepa, Kota Baru today, after observing the affected districts.

Also accompanying the prime minister during the visit was International Trade and Industry Minister Mustapa Mohamed (right), who is also chairperson of the Kelantan Flood Disaster Committee.

Najib said that besides personally observing the houses which were completely destroyed and badly damaged, he was informed that hundreds of residents had their homes destroyed and had no place to live in.

"I see so much destruction and it is very depressing and so sad," he said, adding that the government would take several actions to assist the flood victims in the Gua Musang and Kuala Krai districts.

The prime minister said the government was now making continuous efforts to assist flood victims who were placed at the relief centres, and also helping them to return home after the flood waters had receded.

He said the government would make an evaluation of every house that was destroyed or damaged from the floods, as soon as possible.

"The action that must be taken is to build a temporary home for the victims who had lost their homes to the floods," he said.

Houses for flood victims to be built

Najib said the government would build houses for the flood victims in Kuala Krai in an area that was safer from the floods.

However, the federal government would discuss with the Kelantan state government, as the land to be turned into the new settlement area was under the jurisdiction of the state government.

The prime minister said the construction of houses on river land reserves could not be allowed because of the high risk of being affected by the floods.

Asked whether the rampant opening of land on hill slopes in the two districts was the main factor for the floods, Najib (right) did not rule out the possibility of human negligence being a contributing factor for the disaster.

"Rampant opening of land - especially for logging - has an effect on the environment because there is no natural retention to stop the water from flowing directly to the river swiftly," he said.

The numerous logs floating in the river also had an effect when they became stuck under the bridges and blocking the water from flowing - thus spilling over to the surrounding areas, resulting in major floods.

"This is a lesson for us to take action to ensure sustainable development and a reminder from Allah SWT to us actually, so we must remember the guidance contained in the Al-Quran that humans are actually the cause, God will not be cruel to us but we are being cruel to our own selves," he said.

The prime minister also praised the staff at the Kuala Krai Hospital when parts of the hospital were inundated, and yet they were able to manage the patients and flood victims seeking shelter at the hospital in a good manner.

"What the nurses and doctors at the hospital did was beyond normal as they were under pressure, yet the services rendered by them deserved praise," he said.

Najib also praised the efforts of government agencies and the Malaysian Armed Forces to rescue victims who had been trapped by the floods.

Asked whether the cost for building the houses and other infrastructure that were damaged was included in the RM500 million allocation for the flood victims that was announced recently, Najib said the government would provide another allocation for this purpose.

- Bernama