

'Not too late for Najib to declare an emergency'

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COMMENT It is still not too late for Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to declare a state of emergency in the flood-stricken states.

A state of emergency in the flood-stricken states will make it easier and faster to mobilise all federal, state and local resources to deal firstly, with the worst flood disaster in recent decades (for some states, the flood situation could worsen in coming days).

Secondly, the post-flood situation in states where - although the worst flood situations are over with the receding of flood waters - new problems are beginning with the humongous and mind-boggling scale and scope of the post-flood challenges and dangers.

Kelantan Menteri Besar Ahmad Yakob (right) has said that Kelantan will need at least six months to fully recover from the devastation of the worst floods that hit the state in the past few weeks.

Six months to recover from the devastation of the floods catastrophe is too long, and will impose great problems and grave burdens on the flood victims in Kelantan.

Whether for Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Perak or any state for that matter, the period for the full recovery from the devastation of the floods catastrophe should be cut down from "at least six months" to two months, and this is why a state of emergency for the flood-stricken states should be declared, to deal firstly with the floods disaster management, mitigation and relief during the floods catastrophe, and secondly, the post-flood challenges and dangers.

In fact, a state of emergency should be a normal part of the standard operating procedure to deal with a major floods disaster.

The prime minister was clearly misled when he said that a state of emergency could not be declared because it would absolve the insurance companies from having to pay compensation to the insured, which have since been debunked by insurance regulator General Insurance Association of Malaysia (Piam).

'Cock-eyed arguments by a DPM'

Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin was also wrong when he said that there was no need to declare a state of emergency unless there was a critical situation, such as when the electricity and water supply were completely cut off or when the number of flood victims reached hundreds of thousands of people.

Muhyiddin seemed not to know that for thousands of the flood victims, electricity and water supply were completely cut off for more than a week. Is this not an emergency?

Is Muhyiddin (left) saying that before an emergency situation could arise, electricity and water supply should be completely cut off for the whole country and that hundreds of thousands of people should be made homeless, as a quarter of a million people are still not sufficient?

If so, these are the most cock-eyed arguments ever presented by a deputy prime minister in Malaysia.

It is most shocking and outrageous that both the prime minister and the deputy prime minister do not seem to have a clue as to what is needed for the declaration of a state of emergency in the event of a natural, or even man-made disaster, which has nothing to do with a political crisis.

There should be a total revamp of the mindset and mentality about floods disaster management plans and preparedness, where the declaration of a state of emergency for flood-stricken states or regions will be an integral part of the standard operating procedure.

I can understand why Malaysians as a whole are quite reluctant to support a declaration of a state of emergency, for their experience is for the state of emergencies to be permanent and misused to serve the interests of the executive, such as the emergencies arising from the Indonesian confrontation in 1965, the Sarawak political crisis in 1967, the May 13 riots in 1969 and the Kelantan political crisis in 1977.

A state of emergency arising from a floods catastrophe will be limited both in place and time - confined only to the flood-stricken areas, and lapsed as soon as the floods catastrophe and the post-flood challenges and dangers are dealt with.

I would urge the prime minister to ask the cabinet on Wednesday to endorse the declaration of a state of emergency in the flood-stricken states, which will enable the mobilisation of the 150,000-strong armed services personnel (land, air and sea) to deal with worsening flood situation in some states and to tackle the post-flood situation in states where the flood waters have receded.

Shorten six months to two months

One of the biggest post-flood challenges is to shorten the time needed for the people to recover from the devastation of the floods - for instance, slash the period from "at least six months" to two months.

The armed forces can be mobilised to help the police in looking after security, assist the flood victims who have become homeless to build temporary housing and ensure that there is no outbreak of diseases by helping to clean up the flood-stricken areas.

If the military forces in other countries can render such national services in times of

national disasters, there is no reason why this cannot be done in Malaysia.

The federal government must use all its resources to help the flood victims to start their lives and businesses anew.

This is why there should be a doubling of the RM500 million flood relief allocation announced by Najib to RM1 billion, so that there could be interest-free loans to every flood victim to allow business and ordinary life to start anew immediately, in the shortest possible time.

Every flood victim whose businesses - whether from hawker stalls to shop business - had been wiped out by the floods catastrophe, should be entitled to interest-free loans, ranging from RM1,000 to RM250,000 to restart their businesses.

On Wednesday, the cabinet should take bold and decisive measures on the declaration of a state of emergency in the flood-stricken states, as well as approve the doubling of the RM500 million flood relief allocation to RM1 billion to enable interest-free loans to be given to everyone whose livelihoods had been wiped out by the flood catastrophe.

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