

PM: Big task ahead is rebuilding lives

NST-17/11/2007

■ By R. Sittamparam
news@nst.com.my

JOHOR BARU: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the efforts needed to rebuild the lives of flood victims would dwarf the rescue and relief operations so far, and called on federal and state governments to work together.

Abdullah, in a visit to Kota Tinggi yesterday, which is still under 2m of water, said the government's top priority now was the rehabilitation of flood victims.

He said the federal government must work with Johor authorities to ensure that the more than 100,000 flood evacuees were given every assistance to resume their daily lives.

Abdullah, speaking at the Sekolah Kebangsaan Bukit Mutiara relief Centre in Kangkar Tebrau here, said: "This task of rehabilitating the flood victims will be much bigger than the flood rescue operations that we've been doing so far."

"After touring the flood-hit areas in Kota Tinggi, I realise that there is an urgent need to help restore the livelihoods of the flood victims now that the floodwaters are receding and the rains have stopped.

"The shops that have been submerged in the floods need to be reopened while the evacuees have to return to their homes."

He also added that the Education



Ministry would come up with a programme for schoolchildren who had missed their classes due to the floods, to catch up with their studies.

Abdullah said it was his hope that the improving weather over the last two days would bring an end to the flooding that has devastated Johor.

Asked to comment on complaints that the RM200 relief to flood victims had still not been fully distributed, Abdullah said he would ask the authorities to speed it up.

"Flood victims should also ensure that they and their children receive the appropriate vaccination for water borne diseases like typhoid."

The local authorities are providing free vaccinations.

Abdullah, who was accompanied by Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani

Othman; Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar (who is also the MP for Kota Tinggi) and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, thanked the Johor government, government agencies and non-governmental organisations for ensuring that the flood rescue operations went smoothly.

Asked if the Johor floods would affect the implementation of the multi-billion ringgit Iskandar Development Region project here, he said the project would proceed as scheduled.

Meanwhile, a spokesman from the state police flood operations room here said the flood situation in most districts was improving with 172 flood relief centres now closed.

The number of people still sheltered in 254 evacuation centres statewide had gone down to 80,755 last night from over 104,000 earlier.

However, in Batu Pahat, the number of evacuees has risen to 42,957 with floodwaters still rising in parts of the district.

The spokesman said many roads in the district were under 0.5m of water and only passable to heavy traffic and four-wheel-drive vehicles.

He said most of the evacuees were in Kota Tinggi (14,121), followed by Klung (6,642), Segamat (4,593), Mersing (4,563), Johor Baru (3,142), Pontian (2,438) and Muar (2,299).