

Unrelenting rain has had a devastating effect on Johor. What does the weather hold now for the country? ELIZABETH JOHN asks Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis for answers.

**Q:** What are we doing to find out as much as we can about the weather we've experienced?

**A:** We are consulting meteorology offices in the United States, Europe and Japan. We've been talking to them about weather forecasting and modelling. The Cabinet has asked us (the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry) to present a weather forecast for the next two weeks up to Chinese New Year to the National Disaster Committee headed by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

It is for him (Najib) to decide and give instructions after we present the report tomorrow. The Cabinet has also directed us to prepare the forecast for the next six months.

**Q:** So are we expecting exceptionally hot weather after February?

**A:** We are expecting hot weather, but what we want to know is whether it will be a "normal" warm or "exceptional" warm between February and August. (If it is exceptionally warm), what will the situation be with forest fires and haze? I hope to present this report to the DPM (tomorrow).

We are also consulting climate modelling experts from the US, Europe and Japan.

**Q:** Has the cloud-seeding project to draw rain away from land worked?

**A:** It's working every day. We are trying to make sure that even if there were a third wave, it would be minimal. Just because the rain is coming doesn't mean we have sit and wait for it. We can make use of technology.

**Q:** But it's still raining heavily here?

**A:** What we are trying to do is induce rain before it reaches land. We are using the traditional method with salts and newer methods with flares.

We might not be able to stop the rain completely but at least we won't have such heavy rains. The rains were so heavy in Johor when it flooded.

We are trying to reduce the intensity of the rain.

**Q:** How much is being spent on this project?

**A:** Money is not an issue. We will spend whatever it takes. We have enough in our operating budget for things like this.

**Q:** Are we looking to develop our own model to predict regional climate changes? The global climate models are said to be unsuitable for predicting regional climate variability.

# Hot on the trail of extreme weather

Datuk Seri Dr Jamaluddin Jarjis says many people want to know if a third wave will strike the country

**A:** We have appointed Dr Fredoline Tangang from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia to head a team looking into this with the support of foreign experts. We want to know the outlook for the medium and the long term.

Will the Johor floods become a permanent feature or will it be temporary? This is what we have to advise the committee. We will work with other ministries on this.

**Q:** When do you expect Dr Tangang's report to be ready?

**A:** As soon as possible. We've told him to get all the technology he needs. Malaysians need an answer.

We want two questions answered: Will there be a repeat of Johor floods next December, and what is the weather scenario from March to September?

**Q:** Will there be a repeat of events in Johor?

**A:** Another spell of rain is now occurring over Johor and Pahang. This will last till today. The models are saying the rain may not be as heavy but we are cautious as some of the rivers are reaching their capacity.

From early February, the weather for the peninsula should become drier. What happens in February and March will depend on how El Nino evolves during this period. The El Nino prediction models say it will peak in February.

However, the models run by different international centres do not agree on how it will evolve after February. We will be more certain after March.

**Q:** What about future scenarios, a much longer-term outlook like other countries have, for 2100 and beyond?

**A:** We would like to do this first (two-

week and six-month studies). Then, we will ask the experts to look at future scenarios.

We have watched Hurricane Katrina hit the US and seen extreme weather in other countries but now the unpredictable is happening to us. We thought we'd be immune to these changes.

**Q:** But we do have plans for future studies?

**A:** Yes. We are duty-bound to the people to look at the future, especially those who faced extreme weather events like the people of Johor.

**Q:** Is Malaysia struggling from one weather-related disaster to another?

**A:** We're not used to this. In other countries, people may be used to extreme weather events.

They've had to manage them but, here, things have remained the same for a long time.

Look at the picture in the newspapers of Malaysians harvesting palm-oil fruits by boat. Have we seen that before in this country?

Now that we are facing these problems, we have to learn to manage them. If we can predict the weather better, we can advise better.

Better flood mitigation and management have got to come into play as well. Flooding is contingent on other factors.

**Q:** So, our awareness of these issues is low?

**A:** Yes, it is, partly because we've never had such problems before.

But having said that, the government is duty-bound to get us ready. We are using everything available, all that technology can offer, to help us.

The Cabinet has told us not to leave

any stone unturned to protect the people and property.

We will channel as much information as possible to the public and the committee to make decisions.

**Q:** How will communication with the public be improved?

**A:** We want some reports to be telecast live from our meteorological services centre.

**Q:** Does that mean we'll see meteorologists on TV doing the weather report?

**A:** Yes, including experts. We are also trying to improve the way weather reports are presented to the public.

We are working with TV3 and RTM. We don't want any more "hujan di sana" (rain there) and "hujan di sini" (rain here). We want more than sana, sini. We want them to start reporting trends.

We are also working with telco companies like Celcom and Maxis to give the public access to weather forecasts. People don't have to wait for the eight o'clock news.

They can key in a number and have the latest information. They can have the weather forecast at their fingertips.

**Q:** What did the people ask you most in the past month?

**A:** "JJ, sudah satu, sudah dua. Tiga kali ada mari kah?" (JJ, there's been a first and second wave. Is a third wave coming?)

I understand their concern. People in my constituency (Rompin) had to move to safety three times and wanted to know if they would have to move again. People in Kelantan and Terengganu are asking if they will be hit badly next.

We have to find the answer.