

A heart-wrenching scene

21 killed after huge landslide strikes Batang Kali campsite

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Batang Kali
TRAGEDY

KUALA KUBU BARU: At least 21 campers have lost their lives and 12 others are still missing after a huge landslide struck a campsite within the grounds of an organic farm in Batang Kali here.

In the predawn incident yesterday, nearly half a million cubic metres of soil slid down a slope that started tilting downwards from the edge of the Batang Kali-Genting Highlands trunk road, otherwise known as Route B66, a road maintained by the Selangor state government.

According to the police, the 2.24am landslide swept through the site that actually hosts three separate camping grounds at various levels of the hilly area surrounding Father's Organic Farm, which had given names to the camping sites such as the River Farm campsite, the Farm View campsite and Hilltop campsite.

The area affected by the landslide was said to cover around 1.21ha.

It was understood that at least 94 people had been camping at the recreational area that offers visitors the chance to see how an organic farm works, other than indulging in outdoor activities such as trekking and wading through mountain streams.

According to witnesses, the landslide came in two waves, with the first at 2.24am, followed by another a while later.

Among the heart-wrenching scenes that greeted rescuers were the bodies of what appeared to be a woman and a child locked in embrace, found near the Riverside campsite at about 4.30pm.

"The bodies were believed to be that of a mother and child. We believe the two were originally at either the Hilltop or Farm View area, and their bodies were carried by the landslide towards the riverside area," said Fire and Rescue Department spokesman.

The campsite is about 3.5km from the Gohtong Jaya station of the Awana Skyway (cable car), and 15km from Batang Kali town.

Natural Resources, Environment and Climate Change Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad said the Minerals and Geoscience Department estimated that around 450,000 cubic metres of soil was shifted in the incident, based on the area that measured 500m by 200m, with a depth of eight metres.

It was understood that the area has been soaked for days by rain over the past few days, as the ongoing northeast monsoon led to greater-than-usual rainfall.

The landslide buried several tents, vehicles and other farm structures, causing panic as survivors struggled in the dark to make sense of what was happening.

A farm worker told *The Star* that he and his colleagues only had time to grab their phones before scrambling to safety.

"No money, no bag. Only the phone," Myanmar national Knug Thang, who lived in the affected area with other foreign workers,



At the scene: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim addressing a press conference at the landslide area near Father's Organic Farm, Batang Kali.

said when met at the Ulu Yam police station.

He and his 12 housemates managed to escape with minor injuries.

One of his friends was seen behind him sleeping on the floor while resting an injured leg and others were also using the opportunity to get some rest.

Another victim, 57-year-old Leong Jim Meng, said the landslide was unexpected as the weather had been generally fine for the last few days.

"We were asleep when it happened at 2am. It was too dark to see what was going on.

"We were trapped when the earth covered our tent. I managed to free myself and headed to the car park to call the authorities," he said.

Other survivors have been rescued and sent to various hospitals for treatment, with the bulk sent to Hospital Sungai Buloh.

A spokesman for Father's Organic Farm said 51 adults and 30 children had been registered to stay overnight at the campsite.

The person, who wished to be known only as Chang, told *Bernama* she was unsure whether there were children below four years old as only children aged between four, and 12 needed to be registered.

Chang said the campers were mostly families.

Route B66 itself was only slightly affected by the incident, although the Selangor Public Works Department closed off the road in the interest of safety, leaving the Kuala Lumpur-Karak Expressway as the only access point to Genting Highlands.

According to Works Minister Datuk Seri



Getting updates: Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (centre) receiving a briefing from fire and rescue personnel at the site. — *Bernama*

Alexander Nanta Linggi, there were no visible cracks on the paved road in the area affected by the landslide in Batang Kali, though several metres of the road seemed to be precipitously close to the crumbled slope.

"Checks and visual inspection found that the affected area involved a part of the state road for about 5m," said Alexander in a statement, adding that the slope shifted for about 300m.

Meanwhile, the authorities said the campsite operator at Father's Organic Farm did not have a valid licence to host such activities.

Local Government Development Minister Nga Kor Ming said checks with the Hulu Selangor Municipal Council (MPHS) revealed the operator only had a licence to operate an organic farm.

Search and rescue (SAR) operations continued way into the night, with the aid of search dogs and excavators.

"We will continue for the next 24 hours, provided the weather allows it," said Datuk Norazam Khamis, director of the Selangor Fire and Rescue Department.