

PM: LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS NEEDED

Nadma will discuss flood-related issues, solutions, suitable models to address problem with all heads of state govts

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THE government will focus on identifying as well as implementing comprehensive long-term solutions to mitigate the impact and losses resulting from floods.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said once the post-flood operation ended, the National Disaster Management would sit with all menteris besar and chief ministers to discuss issues, solutions and suitable models to address the natural disaster on a bigger scale.

"Mitigation efforts to tackle floods will be prioritised as we already discussed the short- and long-term measures during the last meeting in October... coincidentally when the floods occurred. The mitigation plans will identify critical areas (flood-prone areas) and what can be done to prevent floods from becoming an annual affair.

"Flood-related issues and suitable solutions will be identified. For example, we will decide on whether to deepen the rivers after receiving the report from the Environment and Water Ministry and the Drainage and Irrigation Department, or maybe in Kedah, shallow water channels will be deepened and concrete embankments will be built along the rivers to avoid the water from spilling (over)," he said after distributing Keluarga Malaysia flood aid to 600 heads of families at the Temerloh Municipal Hall in Lanchang here yesterday.

Present were Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Zuki Ali, Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Wan Rosdy Wan Ismail and Lanchang assemblyman Datuk Seri Mohd Shahrar Shamsudin.

Ismail Sabri said to date, RM1.4 billion had been spent on flood aid and the amount was expected to increase when the government received a detailed report on the current floods.

"The extreme floods this year might result in bigger losses and damage. Each time there is a flood, the government has to spend a lot, so it is high time to



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob visiting flood victims at a relief centre in Temerloh yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

look into long-term flood mitigation solutions."

He said once the issues and solutions had been identified, the government would study the cost and look towards implementing the mitigation efforts.

"We might not be able to carry out all the mitigation plans simultaneously, and we might need some time to implement them. We will focus on flood-prone districts. For example, areas that are known to be first to be inundated compared with other locations in the same district.

"We might study the river dykes flood prevention method used in the Netherlands or the 'sponge city' concept in China where innovations are used to absorb (excess) water. Maybe we need to build water retention ponds to accommodate heavy rain during the monsoon season and use the water during the dry season.

"The Smart tunnel (Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel Sdn Bhd) has been effective in reducing floods in Kuala Lumpur and maybe we could build it in other major cities. Whatever model that is adopted, the aim will be to minimise and prevent

major floods."

Ismail Sabri said he would chair the Flood Management Task Force meeting led by Zuki tomorrow and a special cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

On a suggestion by Wan Rosdy to reintroduce the flood housing scheme (for those living in flood-prone areas), he said more details had to be discussed with the respective state government.

"Land comes under state governments' jurisdiction, so they will have to decide on suitable locations to relocate those living in flood-prone areas. The federal government might be able to assist with the budget. We have to discuss.

"During the floods in 1971, the scheme was introduced in Pahang and was known as Rumah Banjir (flood homes). Those living along riverbanks were relocated to houses built on higher ground."

On calls for the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) i-Citra withdrawal scheme for flood victims, he said those who were unhappy would continue to criticise, and that the government's assistance for flood victims could reach up to RM10,000 for each head of household.

In his New Year message that was broadcast live on television on New Year's Eve, he said victims whose houses were destroyed in the floods could receive assistance up to RM61,000.

In a Bernama report, Ismail Sabri said the cash aid was one of the government's efforts to ease victims' burden without having to take out their EPF savings.

He said with the cash aid, flood victims could keep their savings for retirement.

Ismail Sabri said the distribution of aid, which included compassionate aid, began on Dec 27 which was 10 days after the floods, compared with months needed to distribute assistance to flood victims previously.

"This will benefit more than 45,000 heads of households and the number will increase as we identify more victims who were not evacuated to relief centres. To date, 20,000 heads of households have received the aid."

He said the assistance also included a cash voucher of RM500 for the purchase of electrical appliances for each family affected by the floods.

This assistance, he added, would

be implemented from Jan 7.

He said each victim was also offered free car towing and repair service by Proton and Perodua, in addition to a 50 per cent discount on spare parts, while other companies also offered free car towing services and a discount of at least 25 per cent on spare parts and repair fees at registered service centres.

He said other initiatives included an RM1,000 voucher for repair or purchase to replace damaged private vehicles.

Ismail Sabri said cash aid of up to RM5,000 would also be provided for house repair and for each victim whose house was destroyed, the government would help cover the cost to build a new one up to RM56,000.

He said since non-governmental organisations and volunteers were also donating essential items to flood victims, the government had agreed to give cash aid of RM2,500 to each affected family to avoid duplication.

He said the government was committed to ensuring that all aid and assistance would be improved from time to time and would be distributed to the victims as soon as possible.