

Of frogs and floods
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On a rubber estate near Sungei Siput, 100miles northeast of Kuala Lumpur, about 50 frogs began furiously hopping around and biting one another. Soon 3,000 frogs joined the bloody fray. For two days the battle raged. When it was over, the swampy battlefield was littered with the torn bodies of 700 frogs.

Wars of the frogs are not uncommon in Malaysia, and zoologists theorize that they are battles for mating grounds. To superstitious Malaysians, however, they are portents of national disaster. Soon after a particularly vicious frog war in the early 1940s, the Japanese invaded and occupied Malaya. The country's twelve-year struggle against Communist terrorists began after frogs warred in Kedah in 1948. Two weeks before violent race riots erupted in Kuala Lumpur in early 1969, there had been a huge frog battle near Penang. Thus when the latest frog fight broke out at Sungei Siput in November, local astrologers and bomohs (witch doctors) predicted another major calamity for Malaysia.

Their fears seemed realized last week. Monsoon rains poured down upon Malaysia, causing one of the worst floods in the country's history. At least 60 people were missing or dead, and 200,000 were stranded and threatened with starvation or drowning. Kuala Lumpur was cut off from the rest of Malaysia as the two rivers running through the capital overflowed, submerging most of the city under as much as twelve feet of water. While food and supplies were being flown in by helicopters from the Malaysian, Singapore, British and Australian air forces, Malaysia's Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak declared a situation of national disaster.

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