

Need for different alert for severe storms

THE severe weather warning provided by the Malaysian Meteorological Department (MMD) seems to ignore the realities of a tropical storm and shows how unprepared we are in meeting this potential threat.

This could be seen from the possible impact MMD has identified in relation to the two warning stages: orange and red.

The orange stage lists "flooding in low lying areas and river banks" as well as "thatched/zinc roofs being blown off by wind" as possible impacts of a tropical depression.

The red stage, which is associated with a stronger tropical storm and much stronger typhoon, lists only "swift water currents that can be dangerous to children playing beside monsoon drains and river banks" in addition to the impacts mentioned earlier.

Is the MMD really serious about the tropical storm threat after the country had been struck by Tropical Storm Greg (Sabah, 1996) and Typhoon Vamei (Johor, 2001)?

News reports from neighbouring Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines suggest that major floods and landslides always occur whenever a tropical storm strikes. The severity of the floods and landslides increase with the severity of the storm.

Hence, as we have already seen from Typhoon Bopha, typhoons create more severe floods and landslides than tropical depressions.

The MMD should create new warning stages beyond red, like light and dark purple, exclusively



The retaining wall that collapsed in Puncak Setiawangsa on Dec 28.

for tropical storms. Although the wind speed range of the tropical depression is low, it can create more devastation than the red stage monsoon storms.

The department should re-classify the tropical depression in the light purple warning stage and add landslides as a possible impact in addition to major floods and strong winds.

The dark purple stage, for tropical storms and typhoons, should be a wake up call to everyone concerned since the level of devastation nationwide can be unprecedented.

Additional possible impacts in-

clude widespread landslides in hillside residential areas and roads, downed trees and power lines, collapsed telco and advertisement towers, and raging currents.

In the dark purple warning stage, the authorities concerned should broadcast a mandatory evacuation order to those living near the coast, on hillsides, riverbanks and high-risk low-lying areas well before the storm arrives since it is going to be too dangerous for anyone to be outside when the storm is in progress.

They should also identify shelters that can withstand the very strong winds that accompany trop-

ical storms or typhoons so that the affected population can easily reach them.

The advance warning will also enable the general population to stock up on provisions in case access to shops and supermarkets is cut.

A different severe weather warning system for tropical storms is urgently needed so that the general population is alerted to their presence and to save countless lives that might be lost due to ignorance.

Let Typhoon Bopha be a lesson.

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