

COMMENT



A man **pushing his car** through a flooded street in Kuantan last week. The flash flood **occurred after hardly over an hour of rain**. Pic by Farizul Hafiz Awang

A flood of memories for Kuantan folk

INUNDATION: Continued occurrence despite measures puzzles NGO, residents

PEOPLE in the peninsular East Coast states have a long memory when it comes to the monsoon, which lashes Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang, bringing with it heavy rain and floods every year end.

This trait came up when a little-known non-governmental organisation raised the issue of how millions in allocation for flood mitigation were used following a brief but sudden flash flood that hit Kuantan on Dec 8.

In a hard-hitting article carried by online portal, pahangdaily.blogspot.my, Angkatan Pembela Rakyat questioned the state government on why flash floods still occurred despite the state Drainage and Irrigation Department having allocated RM34 million for 16 projects.

The group, speaking through its coordinator Mohd Shukri Mohd Ramli, said the Kuantan Municipal Council had even implemented

RM17 million in flood mitigation measures.

An exasperated Shukri noted that the matter was all the more galling given that the flood occurred after hardly over an hour of rain.

On that particular rainy afternoon, this writer had the opportunity to witness a 50m stretch of Jalan Tun Ismail 1 in front of the *New Straits Times* bureau office transformed into a watery route traversed only by the most hardened and boldest drivers.

As rain whipped over the sidewalks and buildings, drivers were seen hesitantly wading their vehicles through floodwater as curious bystanders on higher ground gawked at the sight.

The brief flooding, which lasted less than two hours, also affected Jalan Bukit Ubi, Jalan Lim Hoe Lek and Jalan Gambut near the Urban Transformation Centre.

It triggered memories of the 2013 flood, which inundated not only Jalan Tun Ismail 1, but also other major roads like Jalan Bukit Ubi, Jalan Beserah and Jalan Wong Ah Jang, and severely damaged shops

and houses.

Urban dwellers in Kuantan were certainly unnerved by the recent incident, flooding the social media with pictures. Their concern is understandable — the 2013 flood (reported as being the worst in over 30 years) was a mere three years back.

The troubling part is that unlike the continuous downpour which heralded the 2013 disaster, the recent flood happened after slightly over an hour of relatively normal rain.

One could only imagine what would happen if the next rain to hit Kuantan lasts four or five hours.

Following the brief flood, a long-time resident, who worked near Jalan Tun Ismail 1, remarked sardonically that one way to predict a flood was to look at the water level in the drains.

If, he said, the water in the drains was not flowing, then flood would most likely occur.

Kuantan District Deputy Police Chief Superintendent Aziz Ahmad was even reported as saying that the recent flash flood in the city was believed to have been caused by

blocked drains.

To be fair though, the East Coast states have always been vulnerable to the vagaries of the Northeast Monsoon.

Coupled with the rising tides caused by the gravitational pull of the moon, these states will always be challenging places not only to live and work in, but also to govern.

A flood briefing to Tengku Mahkota of Pahang Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah immediately after the recent flood is an encouraging sign that the state royalty and government are looking into resolving the issue.

This is imperative as the people of Pahang have a long memory, even stretching back to the days of British-ruled Pahang of 1923 when a major flood destroyed large swathes of the districts of Lipis, Temerloh, Kuantan and Pekan.

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