EXCLUSIVE

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KL FLASH FLOOD

'SMART TUNNEL MITIGATED SITUATION'

Tunnel entered its 4th mode for 7th time, diverting 3 million cubic metres of water

VEENA BABULAL
AND TEOH PEI YING
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

A city worker removing a silver catfish near Masjid Jamek in Kuala Lumpur during a clean-up operation yesterday after the flash flood on Thursday. PIC BY SHAHMI IMRAN

IF the Smart Tunnel had not been activated to its full capacity yesterday, an area covering 15ha in the city centre — the size of 20 football fields — could have been underwater.

Department of Irrigation and Drainage director-general Datuk Nor Hisham Mohd Ghazali said this while coming to the defence of the Stormwater Management And Road Tunnel (SMART Tunnel) system, adding 3 million cubic metres (m3) of water that could have inundated a 1km radius from Masjid Jamek, was diverted in time.

He said this was the 7th time in history that the system had activated its 4th mode, where the entire tunnel which would regularly be used for traffic diversion was morphed into a storm diversion and retention mechanism.

"The system functioned as required and complied with all SOPs related to floodwater diversion," he said, adding the system's control centre began the diversion of the Klang River at 2.50pm.

Nor Hisham was referring to the backlash received by the department and Smart Tunnel for what was perceived as a delay in the response of the state-of-the-art system.

He said all 6 retention ponds on the Klang and Gombak river circuits were operating at full capacity by storing a 12.2 million m3 of water.

"People misconstrued (the situation) by claiming that the system was idling, because traffic was still allowed to pass before we activated mode 4 at 4.40pm."

Nor Hisham said another misconception was that the system had diverted water from the Klang and Gombak rivers, although it only actually diverted water from the Klang River.

One of the reasons for the unexpected floods, he said, was because the existing drainage systems could not support the large volume of surface runoff.

"While 13 stations in the city recorded rainfall of more than 100mm each, at Simpang 3 and Gombak the reading was more than 200mm in around five hours," he said, confirming earlier reports that floodwaters were up to 0.9m in hotspots.

He also said only Sungai Bunus near the National Library around Jalan Tun Perak bridge overflowed for around 15 minutes.

He said under the Flood Mitigation Plan, there were some projects that needed to be completed.

They included packages within the Sungai Bunus flood mitigation project which is in the building stage. City Hall first had to review its drainage system.

He urged the government to consider underwater systems for Kuala Lumpur by following Japan's model to address the lack to physical space to do so.

"Surplus land owned by the government can be used as reservoirs to be processed as drinking water if the need arises. And space in recreational parks can be used for surface-level reservoirs."

"What is worrying is the state of rivers in KL and its borders. There is no way we can deepen or widen our rivers and waterways due to development.

"Our space is limited and development has to be guided towards more sustainable concepts."

Nor Hisham also said that DID status report on the flood has been sent to Environment and Water Minister Datuk Seri Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man.

Meanwhile, Federal Territories Minister Tan Sri Annuar Musa said his officers would study the cause of severe flash floods which struck the capital on Thursday and find a long-term solution to prevent crippling inundations from recurring.

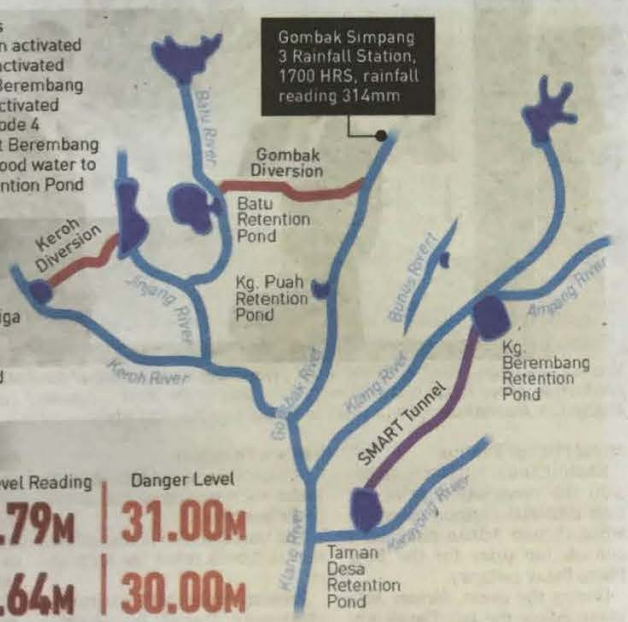
He said it would request a report from the Irrigation and Drainage Department (JPS) and Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) on the capabilities of existing irrigation and flood mitigation systems, including the Smart Tunnel.

He said the ministry would also explore whether developments in several locations in the city had exacerbated the situation.

Heavy rain which lashed the Klang Valley from 1.30pm caused flooding across the capital, with the five worst-hit areas being Lebuh Ampang, Jalan Raja Alang (Kampung Baru), Lorong Air Leleh (Setapak), Jalan Gurney and Jalan San Ah Wing (Semarak). Water rose to as high as 3m in some areas.

CHRONOLOGY OF FLOOD MITIGATION OPERATION

1.00pm : Heavy rain begins
2.22pm : Gombak Diversion activated
2.25pm : Keroh Diversion activated
2.50pm : Diversion to Kg. Berembang Retention Pond activated
4.40pm : SMART Tunnel Mode 4 activated to divert Berembang Retention Pond flood water to Taman Desa Retention Pond



RAINFALL READINGS AT DID STATIONS, KUALA LUMPUR

1	Exceeded 200mm	Gombak Simpang Tiga Station
13	Exceeded 100mm	Around Gombak and Kuala Lumpur

RIVER WATER LEVELS

	Water Level Reading	Danger Level
GOMBAK RIVER	32.79M	31.00M
KLANG RIVER (MASJID JAMEK)	30.64M	30.00M
BUNUS RIVER (JALAN TUN RAZAK)	36.60M	36.00M

Source: Department of Drainage and Irrigation (DID)

2020 INFOGRAPHIC NST

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Lam Thye: It's time to act

KUALA LUMPUR: The flash flood is a sign that the city's drainage system must be reviewed.

Alliance for Safe Community chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye yesterday said that the muddy confluence, which Kuala Lumpur is named after, burst its banks because the drainage system was unable to handle the heavy downpour.

"Thursday's flood in Kuala Lumpur have brought up issues that need the urgent attention of the authorities. The authorities should have been more prepared to handle the effects of heavy storms, especially during this time when we experience the effects of the southeast monsoon from May till September."

Lee, who is a former Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) advisory board member, said DBKL should allocate more money and resources for drainage improvement at sites being developed for high-rise buildings, housing and infrastructure projects.

"It's time to act. We should stop blaming nature and giving the excuse that the flooding is caused by unusually heavy rains. Poor silt traps in construction sites cause mud and construction debris to flow into the public drains, choking it beyond its capacity to drain the excess water quickly."

Vehicles were submerged and parts of the city inundated in floodwaters on Thursday after hours of torrential downpour.