

ALMOST two hectares of land surrounding the flood retention pond in Taman Desa, Kuala Lumpur, has not been gazetted as a buffer zone, leaving it open for development.

Highway concessions company Amanat Lebuhraya Rakyat Bhd (ALR) group chief operating officer Mohd Noor Mohd Ali said the area was equivalent to nearly three football fields.

He expressed concern over the slow gazettement progress.

"We have been pushing for gazettement of the land surrounding this pond for a few years now and the process is slow.

"The Taman Desa pond is crucial because it is important for the Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel (SMART) flood mitigation system," he added.

ALR owns four highway concessionaires – Lingkaran Trans Kota Sdn Bhd (Littrak), Sistem Penyuraian Trafik KL Barat Sdn Bhd (Sprint), Kesas Sdn Bhd (Kesas) and Syarikat Mengurus Air Banjir dan Terowong Sdn Bhd (SMART).

Mohd Noor's concern stems from the fact that potential future floods could jeopardise the SMART tunnel's role in flood mitigation, with climate change resulting in extreme weather, including more frequent thunderstorms.

"We have been through this before when land surrounding the Taman Desa flood retention pond was sold for a mixed development project in 2017.

"And we as stakeholder of SMART tunnel were in the dark over the matter."

The land was transferred to a private company a few years ago.

But thanks to the efforts of then Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) director-general Datuk Nor Hisham Mohd Ghazali, the deal was cancelled.

The Taman Desa retention pond comes under the purview of Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur Land Committee (JKTWPKL).

JKTWPKL and Nor Hisham had pushed for certain technical requirements to be fulfilled before the development could go ahead.

In the end, the developer was unable to meet the requirements and the project was cancelled, with the government having to pay over RM40mil compensation to the developer for

Concern over flooded roads

Highway concessionaire fears development around water retention ponds will affect Kuala Lumpur's flood mitigation plan



Taman Desa retention pond in Kuala Lumpur surrounded by residential and commercial buildings. — Filepic

surrendering the land.

"Even though the pond itself is gazetted, land surrounding the pond is at risk of future development and must be gazetted or the same thing will happen again," added Mohd Noor.

The recent proposal to degazette a 5.25ha land surrounding Sungai Bonus flood retention pond (formerly known as Kampung Boyan) in Jalan Tun Razak have also made stakeholders jittery.

Despite assurances by Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) that the move was not for commercial or property development, but to structure areas of responsibilities between government agencies, stakeholders were not convinced.

In fact, the move reignited calls for the government to speed up gazettement of other buffer zones for flood retention ponds in the city.

Mohd Noor also expressed concern about the condition of Bohol flood retention pond in Seputeh.

This pond is situated alongside Kesas highway and in close proximity to densely populated areas.



Mohd Noor: Taman Desa pond is important for the SMART flood mitigation system.

In 2021 and 2022, Kesas highway, along with certain parts of Taman Kinrara in Puchong, experienced flooding on several occasions.

These knee-high floods were a result of water from Sungai Kuyoh pond breaching the perimeter fencing of a monsoon drain in Jalan TK 2/9.

Furthermore, despite its critical role in flood mitigation, Bohol Pond was considered for a proposed development project.

The project was eventually cancelled due to the developer's failure to meet essential requirements.

Mohd Noor shared his recent visit to Bohol Pond and expressed concerns about its condition.

"We took aerial photos of the pond in 2001, and again last year and there is more sediment and it seems that there has been little maintenance done on the pond," Mohd Noor added.

"While some desilting work was carried out last year, it was minimal, and the mounds of earth were left at the site.

"In the event of heavy rainfall, these mounds could wash back into the pond," he said, adding that the pond did not resemble a body of water but instead looked like a piece of land.

Mohd Noor worried that in the event of continuous heavy rain, Kesas highway and the surrounding areas could once again be inundated with floodwaters.

Bohol Pond that covers a 37.8ha area is designated as a reserved land for recreation.

In an exclusive report on May

8, 2023 titled "Gripped by Flood Fears," *StarMetro* highlighted the planned transfer of 0.75ha land around the pond for a residential project, which included a mix of affordable housing (40%) and condominiums (60%).

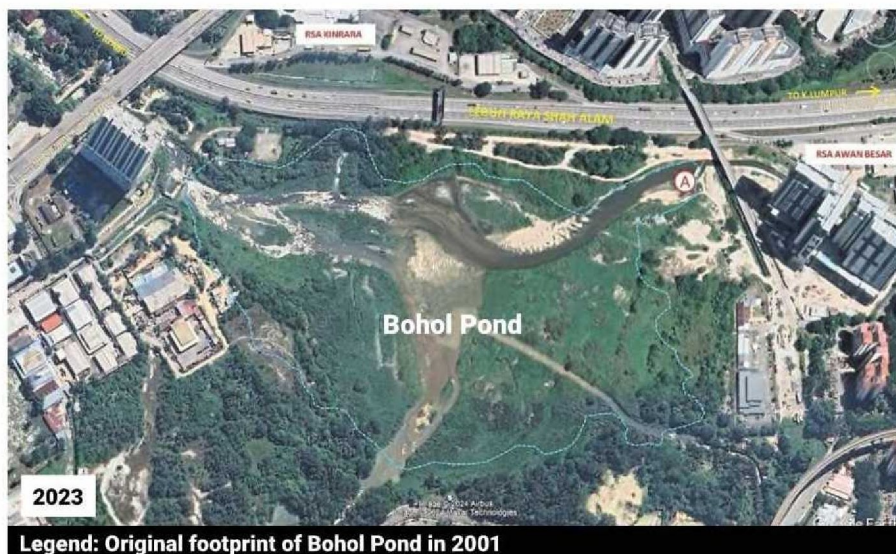
However, following public outcry, the Federal Government decided to revoke the proposed transfer of land surrounding the pond to a private developer.

In June 2019, former DID director-general Datuk Abdullah Isnin submitted a request to Natural Resources and Environment Ministry to gazette Bohol Pond as a flood retention area.

His request was rejected. A subsequent application was made in 2020 by then deputy director of Kuala Lumpur DID, Ratna Rajah Sivapiragasam, to then secretary-general of Federal Territories Ministry (now the Federal Territories Department).

This was rejected by the ministry's then secretary-general Datuk Seri Rosida Jaafar.

However, Rosida confirmed that Bohol Pond would continue to function as a flood retention pond.



Legend: Original footprint of Bohol Pond in 2001

Aerial photos of Bohol Pond taken in 2001 (above) and in 2023 (right). The newer shot shows more sediment at the site. — Courtesy of ALR