

Protect KL's flood defences

May 20 objection session for public to voice concerns

"THERE are times, sir, when men of good conscience cannot blindly follow orders."

This quote from Captain Jean-Luc Picard in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* TV series comes to mind when reflecting on how *StarMetro* broke the story of the redevelopment plan at Kampung Bohol flood retention pond in Kuala Lumpur last year.

Without the help of several civil servants with a strong moral compass, we would never have uncovered the proposed alienation and sale of this crucial flood mitigation site.

Their actions sparked a series of articles that led to the government cancelling redevelopment plans there.

The city avoided losing a vital flood reservoir to development, which would have increased the risk of future floods.

In early March last year, whistleblowers from Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), Federal Territory Land Office and Department of Drainage and Irrigation approached us to stop the sale and alienation of government land at a flood retention pond.

They were being pressured to support the sale despite their better judgment.

The reports and memos provided to us, along with interviews with stakeholders, engineers, environmental experts, city lawmakers and Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability Minister Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, who opposed the land sale, led to the cancellation of the Bohol deal.

These whistleblowers, some of whom were transferred to different agencies for speaking out, had preserved crucial flood mitigation infrastructure.

As such, it was devastating to learn that their efforts might be in vain when the Attorney General's Chambers published a notice in the Federal Government Gazette on May 8, proposing the revocation of the land reservation for public purposes under Section 64 (2) of the National Land Code for Bohol pond.

Designated for flood mitigation and officially gazetted on Nov 4, 2010, the land is now at risk of being developed for residential purposes.

The proposal to degazette the reserve land status and redevelop the site goes against Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's vision of a civil service committed to integrity, transparency

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and accountability.

It was this vision that motivated the whistleblowers to come forward, as they believed it was the right thing to do.

Environmental experts are now urging the government to halt development at Kuala Lumpur's flood retention ponds, as these are critical to the city's flood defence strategy.

"It is time to bolster our defences against climate change, as the weather we are witnessing now is unprecedented and unpredictable," said former National Water Research Institute of Malaysia director-general Datuk Nor Hisham Mohd Ghazali.

With the increased rainfall the city is experiencing, the response capacity of government agencies is severely strained, he noted.

"Our city's water bodies and retention ponds are our best defences and must be diligently protected and preserved," he added.

Hence in view of this, Kuala Lumpur denizens and all other stakeholders need to make sure the Bohol pond land stays as a flood mitigation amenity, which it has been designated.

Attend the public objection session on May 20, between 9am and 4pm, at the Federal Territory Office of the Director of Lands and Mines on the second floor of Federal House in Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin, Kuala Lumpur.

Make your voices heard on why the Bohol pond must not be developed and why the revocation of the land must be stopped.

Consider the 54 people who died in the December 2021 flood as well as the 71,000 displaced and the 125,490 affected, with overall losses amounting to RM6.1bil, according to the Statistics Department.

In 2023, flood-related losses in Malaysia totalled RM800mil.

Chief statistician Datuk Seri Mohd Uzir Mahidin noted that these losses equated to 0.04% of the nominal gross domestic product (GDP) in the country.