

Agencies brace for the worst

Flood relief efforts to take a different turn during pandemic

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PETALING JAYA: Disaster management agencies are bracing for major floods that are expected to occur as the northeast monsoon season starts this month.

Flood relief efforts, they say, will look different this year in order to adhere to standard operating procedure (SOP) during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Civil Defence Force (APM) disaster management and operations director Abdul Wahab Rahim said APM would be taking extra precautionary measures in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"All personnel who have been assigned to rescue boat teams will be wearing full personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout the rescue mission.

"The number of people in a boat will also be reduced in accordance with SOP set by the government, except in emergency situations," he said, adding that other measures such as temperature screening would be done before taking evacuees to the relief centres.

He said those with a temperature of more than 37.5°C and related symptoms would be sent to the hospital for further action.

The occupancy at a relief centre, he said, would also be reduced as portable tents would be placed according to the distance set



Wet days ahead:

Cyclists in Kuala Lumpur riding past Sultan Abdul Samad Building after a downpour as dark clouds loom over the city.

— AZMAN GHANI/The Star

through SOP.

"More centres will be designated for flood relief efforts this time around and will be equipped with full supplies needed by the evacuees staying there for the duration of the flood.

"Since the northeast monsoon is expected to last until March next year, we have to prepare for the worst," said Abdul Wahab, adding that the peak of the season was usually in December and January.

APM, he said, was taking a different approach this year as it would be setting up nine main zones nationwide to coordinate logistics and

manpower instead of just having one centralised base in Klang Valley.

APM would also deploy more personnel for flood relief efforts compared to last year's 10,000, he added.

Fire and Rescue Department director-general Datuk Seri Mohammad Hamdan Wahid said the department would be working with the Health Ministry on the proper way to conduct rescue efforts due to Covid-19.

"For instance, when we evacuate, we need to liaise with the ministry or district health officer to ascertain whether the areas we are going into are Covid-19 red zones.

"We also have to liaise with the ministry and be prepared for cases, such as a hospitals treating Covid-19 patients or an enhanced MCO area being flooded.

"If there are victims who have symptoms and are considered patients under investigation (PUI), we will refer to the Health Ministry on where to quarantine them as they cannot mix with other flood victims," he said.

Fire and Rescue Department personnel would have to wear visors, face masks and gloves to protect themselves from contracting the virus, he added.