

Geared up to dive into rescue work

Scuba units, firefighters working closely with DBKL's task force in tackling floods in city

By BAVANI M
bavanim@thestar.com.my

ON A Tuesday morning at 10am, the Hang Tuah Fire and Rescue Station in Jalan Hang Tuah, Kuala Lumpur, was buzzing with activity.

As the largest station of the Kuala Lumpur Fire and Rescue Department in the capital city, Hang Tuah station was in the midst of a new recruit training session.

Aspiring firefighters were being readied to face various obstacle courses to test their endurance and stamina.

Yet, it was the team quietly training beside two High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) boats at the station's rear that drew attention.

These firefighters' uniforms bear a special arm patch with the words "PPDA", the acronym for *Pasukan Penyelamat Di Air*, indicating that they are trained in underwater rescue.

This is the department's scuba unit, which the agency takes pride in.

The men were seen meticulously checking and rechecking their equipment.



Fatta urges residents in flood-prone areas to call for help as soon as they notice water levels rising.

Swiftwater rescue kits, life rafts, life jackets, harnesses, tethers, scuba suits, tanks – all underwent scrutiny to ensure operational readiness.

But what sets these individuals apart? A multitude of reasons.

When floods occur in the city centre, not every rescue can be executed by wading through floodwaters or deploying large boats.

The urban landscape of Kuala Lumpur with its electrical poles, electrical substations, structures like lamp posts, traffic lights, cars,



Mohamad showing the special arm patch that indicates that he's trained in underwater rescue.

houses or temporary stalls, pose a multitude of challenges.

Navigating these hazards demands specialised training and expertise – attributes possessed by the fire department's scuba squad.

"We have 21 highly skilled divers, trained not only in firefighting but also in water-rescue efforts," said Kuala Lumpur Fire and Rescue Services division deputy director of operations M. Fatta M. Amin.

"In the event of a natural disaster, under the National Security Council Directive No.20 (MKN20), the police will take the lead as the incident commander while the deputy incident commander will be the Fire and Rescue Department."

The MKN20 is related to the policy and mechanism of national disaster management that defines the roles and responsibilities of each Disaster Management Committee at every level.

"Both coordinate with the other agencies, including the state governments for the period before, during and after the disaster to integrate rescue efforts and mitigate the effects of the disaster."

Flood-prone areas

Fatta said the department's proactive approach are especially in flood-prone areas identified by



Preparing for a rescue mission includes ensuring rescue gear and boat engines are in working condition. – Photos: RAJA FAISAL HISHAN/The Star & courtesy pix from KL Fire and Rescue Department

the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID).

With 73 flash flood hotspots in Kuala Lumpur, teams are often positioned on-site before the onset of rainfall, as exemplified in the recent Kampung Periuk flash flood incident.

"At these hotspots, we have noticed that during and after a thunderstorm, water tends to rise very fast and recede just as quickly, which is common in the city." Fatta recounted the incident at Kampung Periuk near Kampung Baru, when the nearby Sungai Bonus overflowed its banks and flooded the village, displacing at least 19 people.

"We were able to rescue people, including a disabled couple who was trapped."

Fatta said the department worked closely with the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) flood task force chaired by the mayor.

"I am impressed with DBKL – it has done a lot of good work to tackle floods in the city."

Fatta was referring to measures by DBKL such as installing pumps in flood-prone areas to channel out excess stagnant water as well as desilting or cleaning traps at retention ponds, rivers and major drains.

Anticipating the impact of the north-east monsoon, which will last until February, Fatta said the fire department's rescue squad

will continue its rigorous training.

Regular checks are carried out to ensure the readiness of equipment, machinery, boat engines, scuba sets, wet suits and related supplies.

Training extended to endurance exercises in DBKL-owned swimming pools and Klang Valley lakes, with knowledge-sharing sessions involving other agencies like DBKL.

The Kuala Lumpur Fire and Rescue Department has 938 firefighters trained in basic search and rescue across its 20 fire stations.

However, the specialised team called Gerak Cepat, comprising the scuba unit's 21 expert divers and three drivers, are on 24-hour standby, ready for deployment to flood-prone areas nationwide during the monsoon season.

A crucial aspect of the team's training is to ensure the vehicles used for rescue missions are in working order.

Managing and operating these assets are part of the job.

The Fire and Rescue Department is an agency under the Local Government Development Ministry (KPKT) and has the largest, most expensive assets that are essential for fire and rescue missions.

A significant portion of these assets, aside from fire engines and fire-fighting equipment,

Kuala Lumpur flood hotspots

PWTC

Jalan Rahmat
PPR Batu Muda
Jalan Selvadurai
Jalan Ipoh
Kg. Kasipillay
Jalan Kolam
Jalan Kuching
Kg. Periuk
Kg. Baru
Wisma Bernama,
Jalan Tun Razak
Kolej Telekom
Jalan Pekeliling
Jalan Tiong Nam
Kg. Pua
Bulatan Dato Onn
Bank Rakyat
Bulatan Pahang
Jalan Batu Bata
UIAM
Kg. Chu Badak
Jalan Pahang
Jalan Chow Sow Lin
Pekan Salak Selatan
Razak Mansion
Jalan Cheras
(in front of
EkoCheras Mall)
Taman Desa Aman
Flat

Taman
Ikan Emas
Jalan Segambut
Jalan Kelapa
Bulan
Jalan Ampang
Jalan Raja
Chulan
Jalan Sultan Ismail
Jalan Pudu
Jalan Tun Perak
Jalan Travers
Masjid Jamek
Universiti Malaya
Jalan Duta
Kg. Pantai Dalam
Jalan Dang Wangi
Jalan Maarof
Jalan Kia Peng
Jalan Leboh Pasar
LRT Bangsar
Keses Highway toll
plaza
LRT Sungai Besi
Jalan Antoi

Kepong
Jalan Pintasan
Segambut
Jalan Sultan Azlan
Shah (in front of
Batu 3 police
station)
Jalan Pudu
Jalan Tun
Sambanthan
Jalan Travers
Jalan Brunei
Jalan Bruas,
Bukit Damansara
Kampung Pasir
Kg. Bohol



The KL Fire Department rescue squad helping to evacuate flood victims in Johor in March.