

## 'Hidden hands' in flash floods

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**FLASH FLOOD:** Overflowing water from Sg Bonus causing a flash flood in Jalan Tun Razak area, especially behind the Public library on Dec 13, last year. — Bernama photo

actually causes the flash floods? Many motorists have this question on their minds while trapped in massive congestion, which means having to be home late than usual.

Many point their fingers at local authorities. Others blame narrow rivers and clogged drains. Some say it is due to climate change.

To environmental activist S. Piarapakaran, it is unfair to blame climate change for flash floods. Climate change, he said, takes place because of human greed in destroying nature.

"It is like when we have fever due to infection. Likewise, it is just natural for earth to adapt to changes in the surroundings. Climate change cannot be stopped. It will continue until equilibrium is achieved.

"But with technology we can be more prepared to mitigate the effects of climate change," he said.

Clearing of forests

Piarapakaran said flash flooding is closely related to the clearing of forests to fulfil the country's growth and

KUALA LUMPUR: It is extremely hot these days, with the afternoon temperature hitting a high of 37 degrees Celsius, but many city folk just shrug their shoulders and move on with their lives.

To them, the scorching heat is better than the heavy downpour that has left them with the anxiety of dealing with flash floods.

Flash floods and the ensuing massive traffic congestion: Many city folks are left pondering this scenario each time the sky darkens.

Nightmare

Flash floods, being a recurring phenomenon to city dwellers, have become part of their lives. However, encountering a flash flood can still cause them nightmares.

Many motorists who use Jalan Tun Razak, particularly the stretch near the National Library, still remember what happened on Dec 13, 2011.

Exceptionally heavy rain, which lasted about two hours, caused a flash flood, trapping thousands of motorists heading home from work.

The flash flood occurred when Sungai Bonus overflowed its banks and the water spilled onto Jalan Tun Razak and the surrounding areas.

A similar situation happened the next day, when a two-hour heavy rain caused some areas to be flooded. Among the worst hit were Jalan Chan Sow Lin and Jalan Brunei in Pudu.

With the two episodes behind them, city folks may now momentarily breathe easier, despite having to endure the blazing temperature from the sun.

Why it happens?

Flash floods happen suddenly, after which the water level recedes within a short time. But what

development.

"Since the early 1960s, we have been experiencing rapid development. So many so vast areas of forests were cleared to make way for industrial, agricultural and housing projects.

"This has directly increased the surface water flow (rain water that flows on top of earth's surface) during rainfall," he explains.

Piarapakaran, who is President of Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (AWER), said when it rains in dense forest, the forest will absorb the rain and release it slowly into rivers.

"In the absence of forests, water flows instantly and this contributes to the increase in flash floods. To cater to the increase of surface water flow, the authorities build many concrete drains.

"However, it does not assist in solving the problem," Piarapakaran said.

Rubbish not the culprit

By looking at the state of rivers in the country, we can see they are fast becoming our rubbish dumps. Even drains are becoming a favourite for many city dwellers to dump unwanted stuff and garbage.

Just take a look at the rubbish floating in the rivers and drains. Today, even human bodies and fetus are reportedly found in rivers! Nevertheless, according to Piarapakaran, rubbish can no longer be faulted for causing flash floods.

Sheer insult

"We often hear people saying how rubbish chokes the drainage system and causes flash floods.

"However, this has its limits. The recent flash floods in Kuala Lumpur and Kajang cannot be blamed on rubbish alone. To continue using such an excuse is an insult to engineering knowledge," said Piarapakaran, who is an environmental engineer. — Bernama

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