KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

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4 DEAD

A MAN-MADE DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN

Extreme weather event, poor slope maintenance among factors, says expert

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Rescue and security officers inspecting the site of the landslide in Taman Bukit Permai 2 in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

A COMBINATION of man-made problems coupled with an extreme weather event may have led to a "perfect storm" that triggered Thursday's deadly landslide in Taman Bukit Permai 2, Ampang here, which claimed four lives.

Experts believe that while there was likely no single factor responsible for the tragedy, various elements, such as unusually heavy rain and poor maintenance of the slopes, could be the cause.

Institute of Geology Malaysia president Abd Rasid Jaapar said based on preliminary findings, heavy rains on Monday and Tuesday led to water not flowing into the drains, but instead seeping into the slope.

He said initial information suggested that the slope was man-made and poorly-maintained.

"It appears as if there was no proper maintenance (on the slopes), which led to the outgrowing of trees. As such, with the drainage system unable to sustain the volume of water, it seeped into the slope," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Rasid, who was at the site yesterday, said there were also geological structures at the slope, such as weathering.

"Sometimes, maybe the engineering elements were there during the slope-making process. However, over the years, lack of maintenance, including poor drainage, may have led to this."

Asked if the houses were built too close to the slope, Rasid said ideally, there should be a buffer zone between the houses and the slope.

"But, I'm not sure how it was before the incident."

Rasid said continuous monitoring was crucial for areas and housing areas in high-risk areas.

"Engagement with residents is also important so that they can also monitor their areas closely without having to depend solely on agencies or local councils.

"For example, following heavy rain, residents should look out for signs at the slope, such as water seeping out and leaning trees.

"We cannot stop landslides, but we can prevent fatalities, injuries or damage."

The landslide tragedy occurred at 5.54pm on Thursday when the slope adjacent to 102 houses came crumbling down during a downpour. It destroyed at least three of the 15 affected houses. Five people were buried under the soil.

The authorities have released the names of four deceased — A. Magindran, 37, E. Ramasamy, 58, Mohd Saifullah Ridzuan Ishak, 34, and, Chong Siew Kim, 85.

Chong's husband, Cheng Kim Cheng, 85, escaped with injuries and was treated at Ampang Hospital.

A massive search-and-rescue operation was mounted on Thursday involving 127 personnel from the Storm team, K9 unit and Ampang, Pandan and Cheras fire brigade stations.

More than 200 residents from 48 houses in the area were ordered to vacate their houses following cracks found at the landslide location due to soil movement.

Hulu Langat district officer Dr Ani Ahmad, who was present at the site yesterday, said 48 families were told to evacuate their homes for safety reasons.

She said the occupants of four rows of houses closest to the site were also told to evacuate.

A temporary relief centre had also been set up at the Ampang Jaya Municipal Council Hall in Taman Mega Jaya here.

She said authorities feared there might still be some soil movement and did not rule out the possibility of another landslide.

Ani, who is also the District Disaster Unit chairman, said a meeting was scheduled to obtain a clearer picture of the situation.

"We will discuss the safety status, time needed and the next course of action later today (yesterday)," Ani said.

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari said the landslide was not due to illegal logging or excessive land clearing for new development, as claimed.

"There is no development taking place at the peak of the slope or anywhere near the site. We believe that the continuous rain and its unusual volume could have been the cause," he said.

"We are investigating the cause and will wait for detailed findings from the relevant authorities before coming to a conclusion."

He added that the state government would give RM10,000 each to the next of kin of the four victims. The state government, he added, was also considering aid for all those affected and the displaced.

Amirudin said the authorities could not start clearing works as there could still be soil movement on the slope.

"It might take a couple of days before the clearing works begin, depending on the slope stability report." **Additional reporting by Faris Fuad**

Page 1 pic: Destroyed houses and vehicles are seen at the site of the landslide in Taman Bukit Permai 2 in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, yesterday.