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Living in fear of slippery slopes

After the latest landslides in Ampang Jaya, residents are calling for periodic evaluation of all hillsides there

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THERE is a need to assess all hillslopes in Ampang Jaya because even those previously deemed safe are now giving way, say affected residents.

Residents' groups in Ampang Jaya, who have seen a fair share of landslides over the past few decades, said a pattern was beginning to emerge, whereby slopes previously deemed "low risk" were now failing.

Following two major landslides that occurred within six months in locations typically not associated with erosions – Taman Bukit Permai 2 and Kemensah Heights stakeholders are calling for increased monitoring and maintenance of hillslopes.

The Taman Bukit Permai 2 landslide in early March claimed four lives and damaged properties.

Worrying trend

Coalition of Kemensah and Melawati Residents Associations chairman Mohd Fazil Abdullah said it was high time the authorities conducted a reassessment of slopes.

"It is not enough to focus only on slopes that were previously identified as high risk.

"These last two major incidents show that all slopes need to be re-evaluated periodically to ensure they are still stable," he told *StarMetro*.



Mohd Fazil: A boom in new developments over the past decade could have affected hillslope conditions.

He said Taman Melawati, for instance, has seen a boom in new developments over the past decade, which could have affected hillslope conditions.

Mohd Fazil, who is also Kemensah Residents Committee chairman, said areas near the Klang Gates Quartz Ridge were of soft soil and sandy conditions that could be easily affected if disturbed.

"The authorities need to be more mindful of the type of developments being approved, especially near or on hillsides.



Zafrul Fazry: MPAJ's last risk assessment of slopes was carried out in 2009.

"It would also be prudent to ensure that there are retaining walls or other forms of protection at these slopes to help mitigate should they fail."

Reflecting on the Kemensah Heights landslide in September last year, Mohd Fazil said it was an unusual event as there had never been such an incident in the area before that.

SlopeWatch programme director Eriko Motoyama said every slope had its tipping point.

"The typical perception is that new developments on hillslopes are a cause for concern as they are 'disturbing' the land.

"But natural slopes are also susceptible to landslides owing to various reasons, including weather," she said.



It was earlier reported that the Selangor government had identified more than 150 high-risk slopes that could possibly trigger landslides, especially around the Gombak, Ampang and Hulu Langat districts.

State infrastructure and agriculture committee chairman Izham Hashim had previously said the identified slopes have become unstable because of excessive rainfall.

A majority of these slopes were identified as high risk just after the state was hit by massive floods last December.

Motoyama said while residents were more aware of the risks of new hillslope projects, similar consideration should be given to older neighbourhoods and properties.

"We have noticed that slopes in mature neighbourhoods are also showing wear and tear.

"These slopes also need to be monitored, not just the relatively



Motoyama with a topographical map of Bukit Antarabangsa, which illustrates the different terrain and elevations of the area.



Some residents of Taman Mega Jaya, Ampang, are still unable to return to their homes.

Major landslide incidents in Ampang Jaya

● A deadly landslide at Taman Bukit Permai 2 in early March claimed four lives, while a fifth victim suffered minor injuries.

Slope failure led to the landslide on March 10 and another on March 12, forcing the evacuation of residents from Taman Mega Jaya and Taman Bukit Permai 2.

Fifteen houses and 10 vehicles were also damaged.

The area was later declared a disaster zone, resulting in the evacuation of occupants from 48 houses along Jalan Teratai 1/2K, Jalan Teratai 1/2J and Jalan Mega 15.

On March 12, another landslide occurred at the same site and residents from an additional 22 houses in Jalan Bukit Permai 1 were asked to evacuate.

More than a month later, clean-up works to remove the debris are still being carried out, while short-term slope repairs are ongoing.

● A landslide in Kemensah Heights last year caused a ripple of concern in the community.

On Sept 17, the landslide affected three bungalows and 12 townhouses, forcing the evacuation of more than 100 residents. Fortunately, no casualties were reported.

Initially, Energy and Natural Resources Minister Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan said illegal renovations by houseowners had triggered this.

But some have said the hill could have collapsed due to the diverging of Sungai Kemensah that flows at the foot of the hill.

Later, Environment and Water Minister Datuk Seri Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man said the Drainage and Irrigation Department would carry out slope stabilisation and upgrading works at Sungai Kemensah, estimated to cost RM10mil.

● A deadly landslide in December 2008 at Taman Bukit Mewah, Bukit Antarabangsa was a catalyst for MPAJ to set up its Slope Unit a year later.

The landslide killed five people and destroyed 14 homes, forcing 2,000 people to be evacuated.

● Ampang was also the area of the Highland Towers collapse in 1993, which claimed 48 lives.





More than a month since the deadly landslide at Taman Bukit Permai 2 in Ampang Jaya, clean-up works and the removal of debris are still being carried out. — Photos: IZZRAFIQ ALIAS and CHAN TAK KONG/The Star

Slope ownership in Ampang Jaya

Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ)	118
Government	37
Privately owned	201
Total	356 slopes

Breakdown of slopes by constituency

Hulu Kelang	114
Bukit Antarabangsa	103
Lembah Jaya	85
Teratai	54

Source: Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ)



new ones."

SlopeWatch, a community-based organisation, has continuously engaged with stakeholders on the importance of landslide and slope safety.

Motoyama said community monitoring of slopes was becoming increasingly important.

"Residents are the best at noticing and detecting any changes in their surroundings as there are usually indicators before an incident.

"If the community is armed with the knowledge of what to look out for, it can be a big help to the authorities," she said.

Motoyama also suggested that early warning systems be installed to monitor slopes.

Low-cost but effective systems that were in the works, she added, could be tested out in places with active community engagement.

Reassessing slopes

Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ) Engineering Department director Zafrul Fazry Mohd Fauzi said the local authority was in the process of updating risk assessment of slopes in its jurisdiction to identify the possibility of failures.

He said environmental and developmental changes could have altered the stability of these slopes since the last exercise was carried out in 2009.

"All slopes under our jurisdiction – be it state or privately owned – are monitored and maintained based on the risk assessments conducted.

"At the same time, we cannot neglect slopes that may not be so high on the priority list," he said.

Slopes must be checked, fortified and maintained regularly, he said, but conceded that this would require high costs.

Out of 356 slopes within MPAJ's jurisdiction, 48 have been identified as being in critical condition.

It was earlier reported that repairs for these slopes would cost an estimated RM100mil.

State local government, public transport and new village development committee chairman Ng Sze Han, during a recent state assembly sitting, said the cost depended on the study findings of experts such as the Malaysian Public Works Institute (Ikram).

Ng said as a start, MPAJ had appointed a panel of slope maintenance contractors so that early maintenance could be implemented and early signs of slope failure could be addressed promptly.

For developments on hillslopes, Zafrul Fazry said new projects would have to fulfil current requirements, even if approval had been given based on previous guidelines.

"If the developer has approved plans but not commenced work on site, they must now resubmit in accordance with current specifications," he said.

As part of its slope monitoring efforts, MPAJ is establishing slope monitoring units among communities near hillslopes.

"By roping in local communities, they will be better able to observe any changes.

"They can alert us if they see any signs of possible slope failure," he said, adding that the units would be coordinated by the area councillors.