



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang
Consumers Association of Penang
檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109 email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com
Websites: www.consumer.org.my



Sahabat Alam Malaysia
Friends of the Earth Malaysia

For Environmental Justice

1, Jalan Joki, 11400 Penang, Malaysia
Tel: +604 827 6930 Fax: +604 827 6932
Email: foemalaysia@gmail.com <https://www.foe-malaysia.org>

Media statement

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Nature's wrath: The tragic floods in Yan

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) and Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) are distraught to hear that three victims have been found dead in several locations around Gunung Jerai in Yan after yesterday's floods.

The floods and landslides were reported to be triggered by upstream water rush phenomenon at the waterfall area near Gunung Jerai. The affected residents here have described the water surge as a dam busting or mini-tsunami with the rapid flow of water, mud, debris, fallen logs and waste.

Kedah Menteri Besar (MB) Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor was reported by the media as denying allegations that the floods here were caused by logging activities. It may not be logging but it certainly is forest cutting and tree clearing. The deluge of water with mud that was seen in videos of the incident clearly shows land clearing activities.

We would like to highlight that we together with villagers in Bukit Singkir, Yan had objected to a quarry project in the Gunung Jerai Forest Reserve more than 15 years ago. This quarry was allowed by the then state government despite violating the Yan Local Plan. In addition, there should not have been any forest clearing here but images from Google show a lot of trees have been cleared and mining operations going on in this environmentally sensitive area.

All these destructive activities in this fragile ecosystem have to be stopped urgently, investigated and rehabilitation measures are taken to prevent such trails of destruction as in mud flows, landslides, and devastating floods.

It is a grave warning and the MB must act and not view this as an act of God as this is indeed activities of companies who have been allowed by the State contrary to the Local Plan for Yan. Gunung Jerai is an environmentally sensitive area that must be protected and not destroyed. Enormous quantities of silt will be brought down from the slopes which have been weakened by deforestation and increased destructive activities here.

The most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is already showing that more frequent and intense rainfalls will be happening due to global warming. What both the state and local governments must do with the collaboration of the federal government is to build climate resilience and take all measures that include halting land and forest clearing particularly in environmentally sensitive areas and highlands.

We cannot be promoting business as usual activities as the massive and tragic floods in Yan have shown. We need to respect nature, recognise its limits and take appropriate mitigating and preventive measures immediately.

We call on the state to hold an independent public inquiry into this tragedy so that we understand the actual causes and also where the weaknesses were and what preventive and rehabilitative measures must be undertaken.

Mohideen Abdul Kader
President
Consumers' Association of Penang

Meenakshi Raman
President
Sahabat Alam Malaysia