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Letter to the Editor

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TIME TO STOP BLAMING NATURE AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) calls on the Kedah state government to take more responsibility for the Baling floods in Kedah and the devastation that resulted in the death of three persons, including a pregnant woman and the loss of homes of hundreds of others.

SAM is appalled by the response of the Menteri Besar of Kedah, Datuk Seri Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor, who once again rubbished logging as a possible cause for the massive gush of water from the streams in Gunung Inas. The MB according to media reports, attributed the cause to a “water head” problem, with the accumulation of water upstream following the rains, similar to the Gunung Jerai tragedy last year.

The water-head phenomenon cannot be a convenient excuse, when we see pictures of large amounts of trees and logs washed down with the gushing of silt laden waters. Also, there is a video circulating widely on social media which shows a company promoting its musang king durian plantations in the Gunung Inas area, involving the massive clearings of forests.

The MB must have seen such videos and explain if they are fake or if there is some truth in them, because the credibility of the Kedah government is at stake.

The Kedah MB’s response in blaming Mother Nature as the cause for the severe floods is most irresponsible, when it defies logic and common sense that the upper reaches of the Gunung Inas are not in a pristine state and not free from land disturbances. The land clearings that are going on may not be for logging, but surely, it cannot be said that nothing is happening in the area.

We are also equally outraged by the response from the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan who also said that no active logging activities had been reported in the Gunung Inas Forest Reserve and that the floods could have been due to a water surge phenomenon, echoing the sentiments of the Kedah MB.

The Minister’s assertion that 5,000 trees have been planted in a 52ha area as part of reforestation efforts in the area is no comfort to us, when such efforts are insignificant, compared to the hundreds or thousands of hectares which are cleared for plantations or other purposes.

In order to come clean on the matter and to regain public confidence, SAM once again calls on the Kedah state government to hold a public Commission of Inquiry to get to the root of the matter, both in the case of the Baling floods and the Gunung Jerai tragedy.

Clearly, there is more to these incidences than meets the eye, and if we are to avert another tragedy of this kind. Such an inquiry is needed to ascertain what exactly is going on in the state of Kedah in this regard and what measures and gaps need to be addressed with urgency.

Simply blaming Mother Nature is not going to work any longer, as the intensity and frequency of such intense rainfalls due to climate change will be a recurring problem.

Also, it is not enough for the federal government to just be seen as providing aid and cash relief as such band aid measures are not going to prevent further disasters from happening, not only in Kedah but all other states, where the rampant clearing of forests for all kinds of purposes including for logging, plantations and mining activities are allowed. It is time to act with responsibility and prevent further tragedies. Let's not wait for more disasters!

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