

# Food for Thought

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## **BE PREPARED FOR WORSE FLOODING IF FOREST DESTRUCTION CONTINUES AT CURRENT RATE!**

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MONDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2014 | Comments(0)

LETTER TO EDITOR - 28th December 2014 (Sunday)

### **BE PREPARED FOR WORSE FLOODING IF FOREST DESTRUCTION CONTINUES AT CURRENT RATE!**

Association of Water and Energy Research Malaysia (AWER) is neither amused by some irresponsible, illogical, idiotic and lunatic attempt to point the recent flood as "punishment from God" nor take the current flooding as a rare occurrence. In fact, if destruction of our forest were to continue, imagine what will be the flood situation when only half of our current virgin forests are left?

In the 10th Malaysia Plan, it was published that RM 5 billion will be allocated for flood mitigation programmes (page 282). Based on latest Budget 2015 breakdown, Department of Irrigation and Drainage (DID) is suppose to carry out projects worth RM 4.638 Billion for flood mitigation from 2011 to 2015, but only RM 2.459 Billion has been allocated so far. The federal government has also allocated RM 1.788 Billion and RM 3.998 Billion for flood mitigation programmes under 8th and 9th Malaysia Plan respectively. What is the current status of these projects? What were the expected results of projects that are already completed until December 2014?

Based on estimated values, losses incurred due to flood is around RM 1 Billion a year. This was a figure back in 2002 published by DID. This means we had a total estimated RM 12 billion or more worth of losses due to flood until 2013. This year's floods will cost us a lot more. However, the loss is not including the flood mitigation, infrastructure reconstruction and compensation allocations. What will be the price that we will be paying in near future if forests are continued to be destroyed?

Flood situation has been worsening over the years and it is time to audit these flood mitigation projects. AWER urges Auditor General to conduct in depth auditing of flood mitigation and drainage related projects that were planned and executed under 8th, 9th and 10th Malaysia Plan. The audit scope should also evaluate the success rate of each project. Auditor General also must compile annual losses for states and nation due to flood occurrence.

The basic science clearly place flood as part of water cycle. Being part of the equatorial climate, "rain" is the keyword. As we have explained before, when rain falls, some portion of it is absorbed by the forest and soil. The balance of the rainfall will be flow on the surface as surface runoff. As we reduce the amount of absorption capacity, naturally we will increase the amount of surface runoff. Why absorption capacity reduces? It reduces due to deforestation, change of land use, increase in impermeable (surface that does not absorb water) surface and basically development to cater increasing population.

Land matter is under the purview of respective state governments. This includes protection of virgin forest as well as gazette of land use under each local government. Clearing virgin forest and replanting with crops does not make an area "green" and "natural". Destruction of forest destroys the nature's ability to "delay" flow of surface water. Therefore, green coloured crops will not guarantee natural flood mitigation. Once a forest is destroyed, it's one way ticket for all of us!

AWER urges the government to obey the nature's law. Every solution that is planned for flood mitigation must "mimic" the nature's method. Water flows from higher to lower elevation via logical passage (due to gravity). It forms fresh water swamps and lakes in its journey. Movement of large volume of water does not follow the passage we humans create. The water moves based on its own momentum and washes everything in its passage that it can overcome. This was the incident we all witnessed in Bertam Valley, Cameron Highlands. Mimicking nature and using its delay method is the only way to reduce or prevent such devastating incident.

Construction of flood mitigation infrastructures is vital. It is also equally important to maintain the flood mitigation infrastructures. However, if the forest covers are continued to be cleared, no matter how much we spend, Malaysia will not be able to minimise or solve its flood problem. This is mainly because, large amount of water will be able to overcome the infrastructures we construct to "try" to contain flood.

Remember, we live in equilibrium with nature. Any attempt to destroy it, we are charting our own destruction!

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President

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