



Disasters Management System in Malaysia

By: Ir. Marlinda binti Abdul Malek



INTRODUCTION

Climatic conditions in Malaysia are dominated by the north-east monsoon during the months of November to February. On the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, and along the coastline of Sabah and Sarawak, flooding is commonly associated with the monsoon. Intense, localised and short-duration thunderstorms are often the cause of flash flooding on the small but steep watersheds along the West Coast of Peninsular Malaysia.

In urban areas of Malaysia, intensive convective thunderstorms during the monsoon season are often the cause of flash flooding, particularly in Kuala Lumpur. Landslips or mudflows are an occasional consequence of heavy localised rainfall. Generally speaking, however, Malaysia is relatively free from massive flooding caused by severe tropical cyclones.

Although Malaysia is geographically outside the "Pacific Rim of Fire" and is relatively free from any severe ravages and destruction caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes, typhoons and volcanic eruptions, nevertheless the country is subjected to monsoonal floods, landslides and severe haze episodes. Also, the country from time to time experiences some man-made disasters which cause considerable loss of lives and damage to property. To mention a few, Malaysia had experienced disasters (both natural and man-made) during the last fifteen years as follows:

- Fire and explosions at Bright Sparklers factory in Sungai Buloh in 1991 which claimed 22 lives.
- Fire and explosions at South Port Klang in 1992 which claimed 10 lives.
- Collapse of Highland Towers Condominium at Hulu Kelang in 1993 which claimed 48 lives.
- Landslide at Genting Highlands in 1995 which claimed 20 lives.
- Mudslide at the Aborigines village at Pos Dipang, Perak, on 29 August 1996 which claimed 44 lives and damaged 30 houses.
- Tropical storm 'Greg' which struck Keningau, Sabah in December 1996 which claimed 238 lives.
- Severe haze episodes in July–November 1997 caused by forest fires which had adverse health effects on the people and on the economy of the nation.
- Landslide at Sandakan, Sabah, on 7 February 1999 due to heavy downpour which claimed 17 lives and damaged 4 houses.
- Floods triggered by torrential rain since November 20 have killed at least 15 people in Kelantan and Terengganu in North Malaysia and nearby areas of Southern Thai in 2000.
- 11 person were killed and thousands evacuated after torrential rain and strong winds hit three states in East Malaysia (2001/12/23).
- A landslide caused by heavy rain buried a communal longhouse in East Malaysia, and at least 10 people were feared killed (2002/01/28).
- A luxury home owned by the head of a Malaysian bank collapsed after a landslide, killing eight people on 21 Nov 2002.
- More than 10,000 people fled their homes after three days of incessant rain sparked massive floods in northern Malaysia (2003/10/05).
- More than 4,500 people were evacuated and at least four people drowned in the worst floods in 40

years on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia (2004/12/11).

- At least 68 people were killed, while 6 people are still missing with hundreds injured in the aftermath of a tsunami triggered by the most powerful earthquake (9.0-magnitude) since 1964 (2004/12/26).

Experience from the above mentioned disasters indicated that there is a need to address disaster mitigation problems efficiently and effectively to alleviate the suffering of the people and reduce the loss of lives and damage to properties.

The following outlines the disaster management and relief mechanisms and summarises some of the accomplishments, current activities and future requirements for Disaster Reduction in Malaysia.

MECHANISMS OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND RELIEF

The National Security Division

The National Security Division (NSD) in the Prime Minister's Department is responsible for the coordination of all activities related to disasters. The National Security Council (NSC) Directive No. 20 was issued to provide guidelines on the management of disasters, including the responsibilities and functions of the various agencies under an integrated emergency management system.

Disaster Management and Relief Committee

To carry out the responsibilities of the NSC in coordinating all the activities related to disasters, i.e. the various aspects of preparation, prevention, response, recovery and rehabilitation, The Disaster Management and Relief Committee was established at three different levels: at the Federal, State and District levels, whereby the NSD is the Secretariat. The main functions of the Disaster Management and Relief Committee (DMRC) are as follows:

- At Federal level, DMRC is responsible for the formulation of national policies and strategies regarding the alertness and the preparation of various agencies involved in the handling of disasters. The DMRCs at the State and District levels are required to implement and carry out such policies and strategies.
- To ensure sound coordination among the agencies involved in the handling of disasters and to determine the roles of the principal emergency services (Police, Medical and Fire Department) and other supporting services.
- To activate the Disaster Operation Control Centre at the District, State or Federal level whenever required.
- To coordinate and mobilise whatever resources and logistics available from Government agencies and if necessary from the private sector.
- To coordinate assistance and rehabilitation to disaster victims.
- To carry out post mortems and report upon completion of the disaster relief operations for the purpose of recording and performance evaluation for future reference and planning.

Composition of Disaster Management and Relief Committee

The members of the Disaster Management and Relief Committee are as follows:

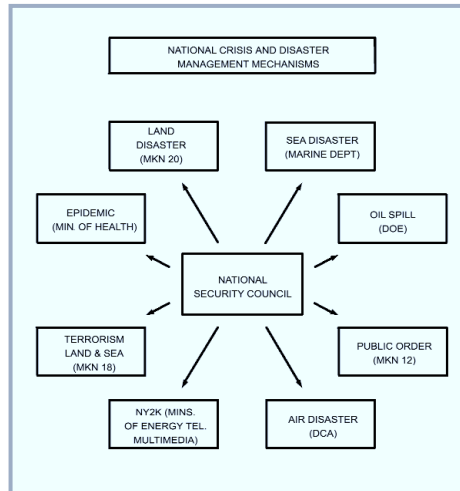
a) Federal Level

Chairman:

- Minister of Information

Members:

- Minister of National Unity and Community Development
- Minister of Finance
- Chief Secretary to the Government
- Chief of Armed Forces
- Inspector General of Police
- Director General of Health
- Director General of National Security Division
- Director General of Fire and Rescue Department
- Director General of Atomic and Energy Licensing Board
- Director General of Road and Transport Department
- Director General of Public Work and Utilities Department
- Director General of Department of Environment



Mechanisms of Disaster Management and Relief

- Director General of Meteorological Department
- Director General of Drainage and Irrigation Department
- Representatives from Ministry of Finance and Attorney General Office
- Director General of Department of Occupational Safety and Health

Secretary:

- Director Crisis and Disaster Management Unit
- National Security Division
- Prime Minister's Department

b) State Level

Chairman:

- State Secretary

Members:

- State Chief Police Officer
- Brigade Commander of Armed Forces
- State Director of Fire and Rescue Department
- State Director of Health
- Other Directors of various relevant government agencies/departments at State Level

Secretary:

- Director of State NSD

c) District Level

Chairman:

- District Officer

Members:

- Officer in charge of Police District (OCPD)

- District Fire Officer
- Medical and Health Officer
- Representatives from various relevant departments and agencies at District Level

Secretary:

- Assistant Director for District NSD.

On-Scene Control Post (OSCP)

An On-Scene Control Post (OSCP) will be opened immediately as soon as a disaster has occurred. The On-Scene Commander will be either the OCPD, CPO, or the Director, Internal Security and Public Order, Royal Malaysian Police, depending on the level of the disaster. The main functions of the On-Scene Commander are as follows:

- To make an early assessment at the scene of potential or actual disaster and immediately activate OSCP if deemed necessary.
- To identify the equipment and logistic requirements in handling the disaster.
- To coordinate the functions of various agencies involved in search and rescue operations.
- To report and advise the Disaster Management and Relief Committee at their respective level.

Special Malaysia Disaster Assistance And Rescue Team (SMART)

SMART was established in 1995 as directed by the NSC Directive No. 19. SMART is directly responsible to the Director, Crisis and Disaster Management Unit, NSD. SMART comprises 85 officers and personnel from the Fire and Rescue Department, Royal Malaysian Police and the Armed Forces. The team is equipped with specialised skills and equipment to respond to any search and rescue operation in any major disaster on land that is beyond the capabilities of existing principal emergency services' Search and Rescue (SAR) teams. The team members were trained in SAR training institutions abroad such as the USA, Sweden, Australia and Singapore. The decision on the mobilisation and the deployment of the SMART team is made by the Director General of the NSD or the Director, Crisis and Disaster Management Unit. ■