

T. Sun 9/6/06 ok

DID: Towns, cities prone to floods

JOHOR BARU: Almost 29,000 sq km or 9% of the land in the country are frequently flooded, resulting in losses of about RM950mil annually.

Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) director-general Datuk Paduka Keizrul Abdullah said the flood-prone areas were mostly in towns and cities.

Among the contributing factors are over-development and lack of proper planning.

"All major towns in the country face the problem as a result of rapid development," he said, adding that about 75% of the

RM5.5bil allocated to the DID under the Ninth Malaysia Plan would be channelled towards flood mitigation projects.

"When an area is 40% developed, the rate of rainwater which flows into the river doubles," he said.

He added that urban areas suffered bigger losses because of the higher property value.

"But we should not discount losses in rural areas too, as damage to agricultural areas has a bigger impact on human lives," he said.

To reduce flooding, Keizrul said the DID had changed its

approach to designing and constructing drainage systems.

"We used to build more concrete drains so that water flows faster into rivers and the sea. But now we try to hold rainwater back, by using retention ponds," he added.

Keizrul said his department had run a pilot project in Universiti Sains Malaysia and found the new system to be cheaper than the conventional method.

"The ponds only take up 3% to 5% of the total housing site. It can be turned into a lakeside recreational park," he added.