22:12:06 Planet Ark - Floods Worsen in Southern Malaysia, 50,000 Homeless

Planet Ark, www.planetark.com

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http://www.planetark.com/dailynewsstory.cfm/newsid/39603/newsDate/22-Dec-2006/story.htm

KUALA LUMPUR - Around 50,000 people have been forced to evacuate their flooded homes in southern Malaysia as the region suffered its heaviest rainfall in a century, news reports said on Thursday.

The rains, blamed on Typhoon Utor, triggered large-scale flooding, cut off several towns in the southern state of Johor, shut down power and water supplies and disrupted train services.

One passenger bus fell into a ravine early on Thursday in the southern town of Kota Tinggi but none of the six people on board were injured, the online edition of the Star newspaper said.

Official news agency Bernama put the total number of evacuees in Johor and three neighbouring states at 50,000, up sharply from 30,000 a day earlier.

The Meteorological Services Department said more rains were forecast in Johor and the northeastern states of Kelantan and Terengganu over the next 24 hours.

Science Minister Jamaluddin Jarjis blamed the downpours on strong winds from the western Pacific Ocean.

"The phenomenon is due to the effects of Typhoon Utor near the Philippines," he said. The typhoon killed 27 people in the Philippines last week.

Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak was in Johor on Thursday to visit flood victims, many of them taking shelter in schools and community halls.

Johor is one of Malaysia's biggest producers of rubber and palm oil. There was no immediate word on the impact on crops in the state, but palm oil prices have risen on fears of supply disruption.

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