

SMART has not failed to curb floods

Dual-purpose tunnel meant to divert excess water

By **DEBBIE CHAN**
debbie@thestar.com.my

THE frequent flash floods in Kuala Lumpur is getting to the nerves of the city folks, especially those living and working in flood-prone areas like Jalan Sultan Ismail and Jalan Alor.

And the city folks are upset about the purported failure of the major SMART Tunnel project that they had thought would end all floods in the city.

The dual-purpose tunnel that began operation last year has certainly done well although not up to the public expectation.

With many misperceptions that SMART Tunnel would solve all flood problems, city folks have forgotten that the tunnel was built to handle 45% of the city's water volume from the Klang River and Ampang River and not flash floods which are caused by clogged drainage system.

According to SMART Tunnel general manager Mohd Fuad Kamal Ariffin, the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has confirmed that the flash floods are usually the result of clogged drains, broken pipes, fallen trees and other obstacles.

Fuad said the public should remember that the SMART tunnel was built to handle big floods and that

since it came into operations, there had been no major flood in the city.

"We are the first dual-purpose tunnel in the world and it has been a learning curve for us all.

"Our team members come from different backgrounds with various expertise to make the tunnel work for both flood operations and traffic flow," he said.

According to Fuad, the SMART tagline is "Saving Kuala Lumpur from Floods" and the company is doing all it could to curb floods in the capital city.

He said since its opening, the tunnel had been closed seven times as an operational measure to control floods.

"When the tunnel is closed, almost 100% of the targeted water flow is channelled to the tunnel and none to the city which is how we save the city from flooding," he said.

After having done seven operations so far, the team can now effectively shut down the tunnel within an hour, including the evacuation of vehicles and people and ensuring all passage and exit ways are properly sealed.

After using the tunnel to divert the floodwater, maintenance and restoration works must be done to clear the tunnel.

"Throughout the year we have



Setting things right: The SMART Tunnel team intends to change the public's perception of them.

learnt to improve and speed up our checking and restoration works.

"Cleaning, inspection and checking is important because we must make the tunnel ready for the next closure," Fuad said.

According to Fuad, the SMART team is far from satisfied with the current performance as it aims to reduce the evacuation and closure time.

"If we don't achieve the one-hour evacuation time, that may mean that the Drainage and Irrigation Department (DID) cannot divert more water to the tunnel and it will flow into the city," he said.

"In terms of closure time, we are aware that although our main purpose is water diversion, we must also be sensitive to the traffic congestion problem so we want to be efficient in both aspects," Fuad said.

But more importantly, he said, SMART Tunnel had to focus on the dissemination of information and changing the perceptions of the public.

"We've observed several trends since we started operation and we

are aware that the information dissemination channels need to be put in place," he said.

According to Fuad, SMART is also working with Bernama Radio and KLFM on the *Cerita SMART* programme where short snippets of information about the tunnel is broadcast to educate the public.

He said the company also had plans to work with other media channels to continue to promote public awareness of its operation and functions.

"We've been featured on the *Discovery Channel* for the *Extreme Engineering* programme and on the *National Geographic Channel* for the *Mega Structures* programme.

These channels are very selective so we were proud when chosen to be featured because we get worldwide recognition. We are definitely doing something right here," Fuad said.

"We want the public to know that we are doing our best to serve the city and we will not be another white elephant that the public will be disappointed in," Fuad said.