

Monitoring slopes to prevent landslides



By **SHALINI RAVINDRAN**

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Hill slope development in places like Taman Melawati in Hulu Kelang is cause for concern among nearby residents. — AZMAN GHANI/The Star

TAMAN Melawati residents in Hulu Kelang have formed a volunteer group to monitor and identify early signs of slope failure.

The Taman Melawati SlopeWatch Volunteer Group was set up by Taman Melawati Residents Association (TMRA) in Selangor after a major landslide in the neighbourhood about three months ago.

The proactive step is the community's way of working together to prevent future mishaps instead of waiting for alerts from the authorities.

The Oct 15 landslide at Jalan Serdang occurred after sections of a slope measuring 20m x 20m collapsed.

This resulted in the evacuation of residents from 20 terrace houses along Jalan E6.

Fortunately, they were allowed to return home two days later.

Based on early investigations, Works Minister Datuk Seri Alexander Nanta Linggi had said that a blocked drainage system at the top of the slope on Jalan G2 was the main cause.



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Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ) later said the slope was privately owned by a developer.



Motoyama (right) briefing Taman Melawati residents at the Landslides and Slope Safety Workshop.

Identifying the signs

TMRA chairman Azhari Abd Taharim said there was a need to address slope safety concerns in the neighbourhood.

“I went to the site to assess the situation (after the landslide), and realised that we need a better monitoring system in place, instead of relying on the authorities,” he said.

Three days after the landslide, Azhari reached out to SlopeWatch programme director Eriko Motoyama to

SlopeWatch, a community- driven organisation formed in 2009, works with stakeholders to raise awareness of landslide and slope safety.

“Eriko and I discussed some of the main issues in Taman Melawati.

“We then decided to hold our first workshop with interested residents and the response has been very positive,” said Azhari.

Some 60 residents showed up at the Landslides and Slope Safety Workshop hosted by TMRA and SlopeWatch which was held at SMK Taman Melawati in November last year.

During the workshop, participants learnt about triggers that contribute to landslides, topography of the area and most importantly – signs of potential slope failure (see graphic).

“Because you are familiar with your surroundings, you are the best observer of any changes in the slopes around your homes,” Motoyama told participants during the workshop.

Every slope has a tipping point, she said.



File photo of residents looking at the site of the landslide-hit area at Jalan E6 in Taman Melawati.

While new hillside developments were often seen as a primary concern, she pointed out that natural slopes were equally prone to landslides due to factors such as weather.

She highlighted the need for vigilance at new hill slope projects and older neighbourhoods.

Motoyama, who emphasised the importance of community involvement, said, “Residents are often the first to notice changes in their surroundings.

“Indicators such as cracks in retaining walls, fallen trees or ground movement usually precede an incident.

“Equipping communities with the knowledge to identify these signs can greatly assist in disaster risk reduction.”

Motoyama also drew attention to the vulnerability of older hill slopes, particularly those developed 30 to 40 years ago, such as in Taman Melawati.

“Regular checks and maintenance are crucial in these areas.

“Property owners shoulder the responsibility to inspect their surroundings frequently,” she said, stressing that addressing these issues early could prevent significant damage.

Increasing vigilance

One of the key outcomes of the workshop was the setting up of a slope watch committee in each of the 10 zones within Taman Melawati.

“The committee has 20 members,” said Azhari.



“In December, we had a site visit to some of the areas and slopes that we will be monitoring.

“Each zone committee will gather information from their respective members, which we will then collate and escalate to the authorities if needed.

“We will also be carrying out hazard mapping exercises to identify potential signs and risks which can contribute to slope failure.”

According to Azhari, the community mapping exercise is to familiarise themselves with and understand natural as well as man-made surroundings to reduce the chances of slope failure.

Next month, the group plans to visit the first-ever Community Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Resource Centre in Malaysia.

Located in Bukit Antarabangsa, Ampang, the centre serves as a communal hub for residents to learn about their physical environment as well as equip themselves with knowledge to mitigate disaster risks.

Azhari said it was time for the community to adopt a more proactive approach to slope safety.

“We want to stay ahead of potential problems, especially as there will no doubt be future development projects in the area,” he said.



Residents jotting down past incidents of landslides in Taman Melawati during the workshop.

Taman Melawati resident Ooi Hoow Kiong said the workshop was an important starting point for the

The retired geotechnical engineer, who has lived in Taman Melawati since 1998, said some might not be aware about slope safety.

“This is something that needs to change. The workshop is just the beginning.

“I hope that we can make further progress so residents can actively monitor their surroundings and report potential issues.”

He said residents who regularly cycle or walk around the area were valuable sources of information, given their familiarity with the local terrain.

Looking ahead, Ooi stressed the need for a clear plan on how information gathered by residents could be relayed to relevant authorities.

“The next steps should focus on establishing a system that ensures the information reaches the right people and is acted upon promptly,” he said.

Drawing on his professional experience, Ooi highlighted the critical role of drainage maintenance in preventing slope failures.



Ooi: A clear plan is needed on how information gathered by residents is relayed to the relevant authorities.

“Over time, water from blocked drains seep into the soil, weakening it and making it heavier, increasing the risk of landslides.

“This is something that can be prevented at an early stage,” Ooi elaborated, noting that preventive maintenance was typically more cost-effective than addressing problems after they worsen.

He also called on the authorities to play their part by responding swiftly to reports from residents.

“Authorities must be quick to take action when there is a report.

“Delays can make small problems much worse,” he said.

Growing awareness

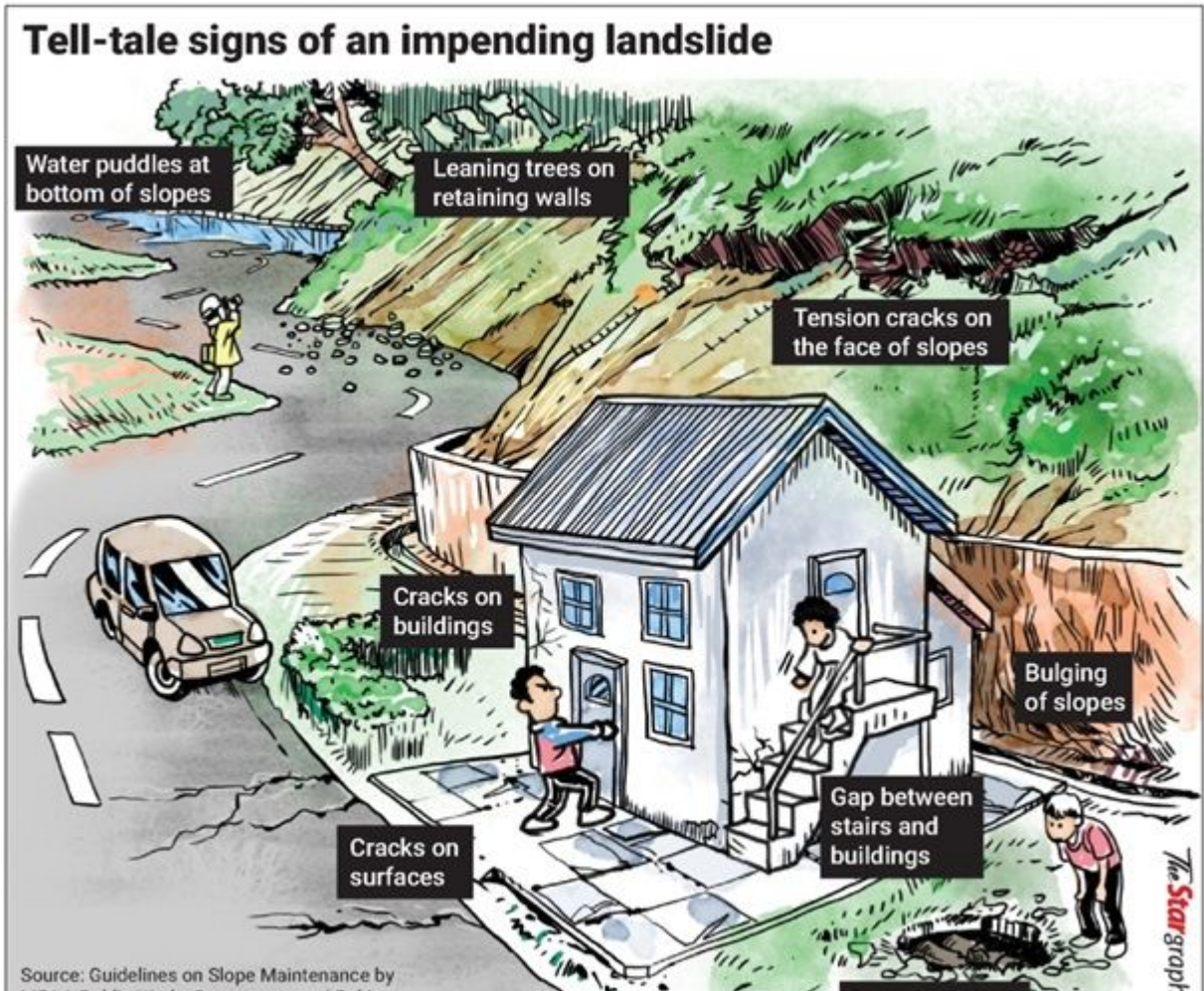
Increasing awareness of hill slope risks across the country has motivated residents to take proactive measures, said Motoyama.

“People are now more mindful of the long-term effects of development on their surroundings, especially once developers are no longer involved,” she told StarMetro.

SlopeWatch, she said, has noticed an increase in resident- initiated monitoring groups over the last few years.

“We have been asked to help with the setting up of such groups and share the knowledge and information that we have gathered over the years.”

The NGO SlopeWatch, set up in 2009, not only deals with landslide concerns but other disasters like floods.



“We also work with local authorities and agencies on the best way to disseminate vital information for disaster risk reduction,” Motoyama added.

MPAJ had said that it regularly monitored slopes to prevent landslides and ensure residents’ safety.

MPAJ president Dr Ani Ahmad said proactive measures included issuing reminders to developers on ensuring safety protocols at construction sites.

She had said the lack of drainage maintenance was identified as the cause of the October disaster, for which repair works were completed in November.

Selangor Mentri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari also revealed that the site was one of 114 red-zone areas at risk of landslides in the Ampang Jaya municipality.

StarMetro previously reported Amirudin attributing the cause of the landslide to possible lapses in infrastructure maintenance, and saying that over-development was not the reason.

He had stated that the last planning approval for the area, primarily for bungalow lots, was issued in 2014.

He added that a full report on the landslide would be presented to the Selangor Economic Action Council (MTES) after review, though details were not disclosed.

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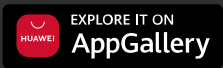


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