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Tunnel closure prevents floods in KL

KUALA LUMPUR: The closure of the RM2 billion Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel (Smart) at Sungai Besi beginning 6pm on Tuesday saved the city from being flooded.

Drainage and Irrigation Department's Kuala Lumpur Flood Mitigation Project director K.J. Abraham said water was filling the tunnel at 300 cubic metres per second at 6pm on Tuesday.

This forced the department to issue a closure order for the tunnel. Due to the heavy rain in the city, the water, if not diverted out, would have resulted in Dataran Merdeka being under water.

"We directed a lot of the water through the tunnel. We are still waiting for the de-watering process as it takes time," Abraham told the New Straits Times.

Traffic at the Sungai Besi area nearly came to a standstill yesterday morning as motorists were not aware that the tunnel was still closed.

Abraham said the department would normally issue a closure order to Smart, a joint project by MMC Corporation Bhd and Gamuda Bhd, when the water flows into the tunnel at 150 cubic metres per second.

The tunnel will be re-opened once the situation is under control.

"There are two things to consider before re-opening the tunnel. First, we need to wait for the de-watering process to take place.

"Secondly, we have to monitor the weather forecast to avoid a second closure," he said.

The RM2 billion tunnel, which was fully operational in June, is able to store three million cubic metres of flood water. The project's motorway component was opened to traffic on May 14.

The Malaysian Meteorological Department had forecast thunderstorms during the afternoons in the city centre until Friday.

As of 6pm yesterday, the tunnel remained closed. The public will be informed of the re-opening of the tunnel via the radio and other variable signage.