Panel of experts on flooding will take a long-term view

SINGAPRE — The panel of experts conducting an in-depth review of how to alleviate flooding here will take a long-term view of things – as far as 30 years down the road, said Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Vivian Balakrishnan yesterday.

It will consider the potential “strategic trade-offs” Singapore may have to make, land use, how much work has to be done underground, and dealing with surface run-off versus conserving water for Singapore’s reservoirs, among other issues, he said.

Speaking at a two-day panel meeting here to discuss long-term solutions to flooding in Singapore, panel chairman Professor Chan Eng Soon said they would also be studying rainfall patterns and flooding in Singapore over the past 30 years.

The 12-member panel visited the Marina Barrage yesterday and will visit flood-prone areas in Orchard Road and Bukit Timah today.

Dr Balakrishnan, who spoke to reporters on the sidelines of the meeting, said the panel has a free hand to come up with “practical and affordable” recommendations.

The panel will have to factor in issues such as climate change and sea level rises, and the fact that Singapore is highly urbanised, and likely to become even more so.

While its focus will differ from the Inter-Agency Drainage Review Committee formed last August, it will consider the committee’s recommendations, he said. In the meantime, the Government is now stepping up on investments in meteorological monitoring equipment, such as rain gauges, flow meters and radar systems.

He also said the panel would also consider public feedback — not just calling for specific proposals, but also for feedback on “localised, specific problems areas in their own neighbourhood” that can be fixed.

The panel’s newest addition from the United Kingdom, Professor David J Balmforth, an executive technical director at global engineering firm MWH, said that not all flooding solutions used in other major capital cities can be applied here.

He said: “One of the main differences here compared with England is that your rain storms are very different, the rain intensity is very much greater... You’re also an island state. The level of development in Singapore is quite high. So that means certain things that may be done elsewhere may not be able to be applied in quite the same way.” WAYNE CHAN