

A new era dawns for Kampung Baru

BY MARK MATHEN VICTOR

LOCATED in the heart of Kuala Lumpur is Kampung Baru, a Malay enclave that has existed since colonial times.

Steeped in history, both political and cultural, the largely frozen in time Kampung Baru has weathered both conflicts and attempts at modern development, said an elderly man *theSun* spoke to at the Kampung Baru LRT station.

"The (pro-independence, anti-colonial) protests that led to the formation of the United Malays National Organisation (Umno) took place here," he said, gesturing in the direction of Kelab Sultan Sulaiman.

"There have been several times where business people have tried to buy or develop the land here. But this is an area gazetted by the British since before independence, for the Malay community," said the 53-year-old man who did not want to be identified.

"We have to protect this place," he continued, before giving a veiled warning that others in Kampung Baru do not take outsiders' suggestions about developing the area likely as the topic is rather controversial.

This turned out to be true for another man we tried to speak to nearly ran us off his land in anger thinking that we were there to buy his property. Land developers showing



Aziah with her daughter in their heritage-style home. — ZULKIFLI ERSAL/THE SUN

up in Kampung Baru is both a normal occurrence and a bothersome one.

But those born after Merdeka, such as 35-year-old Aziah, are more open to the prospect of having to leave their family homes to make way for development.

"My father is from Kampung Baru. Initially, we didn't agree to any proposals to have this place developed, but in keeping with the current situation and the surrounding environment, it has to be developed. This place will definitely change, just as the surrounding areas have.

"The Malay culture will definitely be eliminated once this place is developed. We originated from here,

but we do have other places we can choose to move to. This (redevelopment) is what the government wants, so we just have to accept it. But most of the residents here aren't in favour of development.

"Hopefully the development will be worth it for those of us who have to sacrifice our way of life," Aziah concluded.

Yet sentiments can sway entirely in a different direction for those who haven't spent decades in Kampung Baru. "Like it or not, it doesn't matter. For me, if they want to make Kampung Baru more beautiful, it's good," said 23-year-old Hanafi.

"It's good as long as these Malay places and culture aren't destroyed,"



Hanafi welcomes the redevelopment plan for the area.

he continues. Hanafi has only lived in Kampung Baru for the past four years.

On the way out of Kampung Baru, a couple of secondary school students spoke to *theSun* at the Kampung Baru LRT station.

"I don't really care. When we wake up, it's in Kampung Baru. When we go to school, it's outside Kampung Baru. But we will miss this place," said 16-year-old Aziq.

"Our grandparents are adamant in not selling or moving, even if we are okay with it. My friends can't wait to see our area developed, but we care about our parents and grandparents who have been here since before Merdeka," said the other student,

Hakim. He said there has to be a middle ground between developing and maintaining the area. (The names of both teenagers have been changed at their request.)

A town hall session has been scheduled for Sept 21 on the Kampung Baru redevelopment project, where land owners and residents will have an opportunity to engage government representatives on the matter.

The proposed redevelopment of Kampung Baru will see the Malay enclave becoming an integrated modern settlement with an increase in residential units, while maintaining the cultural heritage of the area.