



### Residents face hurdle in bid to rebuild homes at original site

**KUANTAN:** The Sungai Lembing fire victims who are hoping to rebuild their razed homes at their old site could face some setbacks.

The razed wooden premises, comprising 20 two-storey shophouses, 11 single-storey terrace houses and a library, are located on a heritage site and the victims do not have individual ownership grants.

Kuantan Municipal Council (MPK) public relations officer Norkamawati Kama said the row of shophouses and terrace houses did not have ownership titles as the site was gazetted as a historical zone on April 11, 2013.

"The Sungai Lembing historical zone is under the jurisdiction of the State Secretary's Office, while MPK is responsible to maintain the site.

"Only the state government can decide and allow the victims to repair or rebuild their homes at the site," she told the *New Straits Times* recently.

Sungai Lembing Community Management Council chairman Muhammad Ridzal Sukimi said since the former tin mining village was a heritage site, the occupants had no land grants.

However, he said, the Housing and Local

Government Ministry was prepared to hold a discussion and find a win-win solution to restore the destroyed buildings.

"Personally, I hope the destroyed premises will be rebuilt according to their original specifications.

"It would mean a lot to the people living in this town."

Yong Siew Meng, who heads the newly setup action committee responsible for rebuilding the homes, said previous efforts by villagers to obtain land ownership in 2011 was rejected by the Kuantan District and Land Office on grounds that the town would be gazetted as Sungai Lembing historical zone and a tin mining heritage site.

She said they were instead advised to apply for reserve land leases (*pajakan tanah rezab*), which they did.

However, no reply had been received until today.

"We hope to obtain approval from the state government to rebuild the homes at the original site.

"We are raising funds for the construction work and hope to receive some good news soon," she said.

Lim Yeap Soon, 70, said most of the villagers had lost valuables, which had been in their possession for generations, and there was no way for them to recover the items.

"Some lost a huge collection of photo albums, antique mining tools from the colonial days and other priceless items.

"Since most of them worked at the former mining company (PCCL), they kept some of the items as mementos.

"Now everything is gone.

"Valuables collected over the years have turned to ashes.

"We no longer have any luxury items or even clothing.

"We hope the state government will at least allow us to build our homes on the existing site," he said, adding that the only thing that brought a smile to the victims' faces these days was when generous individuals came to the SJK(C) Sungai Lembing hall here to distribute assistance, including cash.

Checks by the *New Straits Times* showed that the razed buildings had emerged as an attraction, as people flocked to the area to take pictures before walking to the Chinese school hall located about 100m from the site to hand over assistance and donations.

There has been a steady stream of visitors making their way to Sungai Lembing since Aug 31, including politicians, businessmen, representatives of non-governmental organisations and members of the public, to lend a helping hand, and the numbers are expected to increase.



Yong Siew Meng



Housing and Local Government Ministry special coordinator Zakaria Abd Hamid (second from right) and Legenda Duta Sdn Bhd managing director Datuk Mohd Bakri Abdul Majid (right) handing over aid and donations to a fire victim at the SJK(C) Sungai Lembing hall in Kuantan recently.