

# KERATAN AKHBAR

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## Old folk's home goes on despite fire

Plans in place for it to be made a convalescent home for seniors

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**GEORGE TOWN:** The Thean Oon Senior Home in Lebuah Carnavon which escaped last Wednesday's fire will continue to operate pending approval by the authorities to convert the building into a convalescent home.

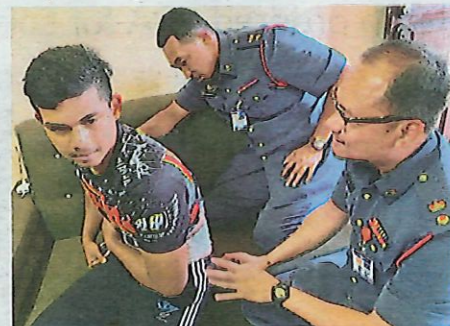
Supervisor Koay Chee Kean, 49, said the home started four years ago in the former Li Tek Seah (Li Tek Society) and Li Tek School building.

"The original plan was to convert the building into a heritage hotel, but we realised there were many families with elderly folk in need of care and there were not many old folks' home which took in residents who are bedridden," he said.

Koay claimed although the home had obtained approval from the Fire and Rescue Department as well as the Health Department, it was still awaiting an answer from the Penang Island City Council to allow them to convert the building into a convalescent home.

"We have submitted the application last year and are still waiting for approval," he said.

A visit to the home yesterday showed the residents in a joyful



Calm after the storm: Residents spending time at the Thean Oon Senior Home in Lebuah Carnavon. (Top) State Fire and Rescue Assistant Director Mohd Hafiz Hafizal Timaradin (right) checking injuries to Muhammad Faris as State Fire and Rescue Zone 1 Chief Muhammad Tarmizi Md Jaafar (centre) looks on in Batu Lanchang, Penang.

mood, with some of them resting on reclining chairs at the foyer chat-chatting while others went on with their daily activities.

"We spend between RM50,000 and RM60,000 monthly to run this home. The building rental is RM12,000 and we have nine staff members to maintain it," said Koay.

He said the 70 senior citizens at the home were above 60 with most of them being paralysed due to stroke.

"Some come from underprivileged families whose children are working and could not afford nursing homes.

"Residents here pay between RM500 and RM1,200 per month

each," he said.

Koay said maintaining the current place was costly and the home did not mind relocating if any individual or organisation could help them find a new place and sponsor the monthly maintenance fees.

He was thankful the home and the residents were safe during evacuation in the Wednesday night fire which gutted an entire block of colonial shophouses next to the home.

People have contacted the home to donate wheelchairs which have gone missing while the residents were temporarily housed at the Penang Youth Centre in Lebuah Acheh and Khoo Kongsi's premises in Cannon Square on the night of the fire.

"CCTV footage showed unidentified individuals entering the building while volunteers were busy evacuating the residents in the dark.

"But following a power cut, the cameras stopped recording and we could not determine who were the people who had entered the building and if they left with any belongings," Koay said, adding that the home had not lodged a police report.

Over 10 fire engines were deployed to put out the fire while four firemen were reportedly injured when one of the walls between the shophouses collapsed.

Among the injured firemen was 20-year-old Muhammad Faris Abdul Latiff from the Bagan Jermal station.

"I was upstairs at one shophouse putting out the raging fire when the wooden floor suddenly fell apart.

"I crashed to the ground and debris fell on me," said Muhammad Faris, who sustained cuts and bruises to his face and back.

The Li Tek Seah Building is a two-storey bungalow and was home to the wealthy 19th century pepper trader Khoo Tiang Poh, who is a prominent member of the Khoo Kongsi.

The house became Li Teik Seah, a youth club, in 1921.

It was here that the Penang Philomatic Union was established before it moved to 65, Macalister Road in 1932.