

Pleas for legal status

Over 100 SMEs operating in Salak South New Village fall foul of DBKL zoning laws and fear closure

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WHENEVER Wong Tean Kei stops to take a break from work, he tends to look out of his home perched on a hilltop.

From here, he gets a view of Kuala Lumpur city centre in the distance.

On a clear day, he can even spot the Tun Razak Exchange development from his workspace.

The view is indeed priceless, but it gives him little pleasure these days as he is constantly worrying about his livelihood and his future.

Wong lives in Salak South New Village, located on a hilltop south of Kuala Lumpur.

The hilltop is gazetted as a residential area.

However, Wong operates his workshop making glass and aluminium products from his home here, which makes it illegal under Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) zoning laws.

Because of this, he does not have the licence required to operate his business and has been at the mercy of enforcement officers from various government agencies who come and go, carrying out inspections in this neighbourhood.

But Wong is not alone.

Crucial to economy

There are more than 100 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Salak South New Village that are operating from residential lots.

Most of these houses have been turned into storage facilities or workshops for furniture, iron work, plywood, paint work, hardware, machinery, carpentry and bakery, while some remain as both residential and business premises.

During the movement control order, the economy of the village, just like everywhere else, had ground to a halt.

But lately, with the nation reopening to businesses under the National Recovery Plan (NRP), many of these SMEs had applied to the International Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti) to resume their operations.

They were rejected because they did not have a valid licence to do business.

Miti has asked them to apply for licences under DBKL.

"I had several visits from enforcement officers from DBKL, Health Ministry and Miti, and it is unfair that we are being punished for something that we are unable to control," said Wong Chee Hong, who is a member of the Small and Medium Enter-

prises Salak South New Village Association.

"We cannot do business in peace as such," he added.

They are now seeking help from DBKL to legalise their business and allow them to operate.

Federal Territories MCA DBKL Affairs Bureau chief Banie Chin explained the situation.

"They are in a tight spot because they don't have licences, and they cannot get one despite having applied for decades because they are running their businesses from home.

"We want to help legalise these, and we have been trying for years.

"Their situation is unique because the new village was established more than 60 years ago by the British during the Emergency to isolate the population from Communist insurgents," he said.

Chin, who is also the association's adviser, said there were around 2,000 residential lots in the village, 900 of which had been granted land titles in the past.

The remainder, which are built by residents for their extended families, have been waiting for their titles for years.

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Some of the houses in Salak South New Village are clustered haphazardly and not in the best of conditions.



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Too many safety and health hazards, says DBKL

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Association chairman Cheng Kow said if they were not allowed to operate, the businesses would die and this would have a rippling effect on other industries in Kuala Lumpur.

“The government must protect the SMEs. They are our livelihood, and in particular the ones in Chinese new villages where poverty is still a big concern among residents,” he stressed.

According to Cheng Kow, talks to relocate the SMEs to a designated area in the village was initiated in 2014.

He said a site was identified for the purpose, but it did not pan out as the landowner had decided to sell the land to a developer.

“The Prime Minister talks about the ‘Malaysian Family’ concept, whereby he wants to bring about socio-economic development that is fair and inclusive under the 12th Malaysia Plan.

“He mentions wanting to boost the economy and uplift poor Chinese families, particularly those in new villages, by assisting in expanding their businesses.

“In view of that, we should be given licences and allowed to reopen,” he said.

Chin pointed out that Salak South was not the only Chinese new village in Kuala Lumpur experiencing such issues.

“There are some 500 SMEs in Jinjang and Air Panas that are also in the same boat.

“We hope to have a meeting with Kuala Lumpur mayor Datuk Seri Mahadi Che Ngah to find a solution soon because people are suffering and they need help,” he said.

Serene but ‘messy’ village

“Messy” was the word used by Sheryl Lin to describe Salak South New Village.

Lin has been living in the village since birth and has a strong attachment to the place where she was raised.

She loves the cool air as well as the sounds of chattering birds and crowing



Anwar: DBKL needs to re-examine policies, planning and zoning laws to resolve the problem.



Chin: Some 500 SMEs in Jinjang and Air Panas are in the same boat as Salak South businesses.

roosters, but disapproves of the unkept rows of houses with rooftops damaged by overgrown trees and shrubs.

“Many of the houses have been renovated and extensions can be seen encroaching onto the back lanes and side lanes.

“I like the place, but in some parts, it has become uncontrolled and messy,” she said.

Another resident, Yee Shuen, agreed with Lin about the condition of the old houses and added that she did not like the idea of living next door to a spray paint shop.

“I worry about the chemicals and odour pollution.

“The ‘factories’ are too close to our homes and there has to be some safety features in place to shield us from the chemicals,” said Yee.

One resident, who wanted to be known only as Tan, said he was living next door to a house-turned-coffeeshop.

“I like the coffee, it is convenient for me if I want to get breakfast or lunch. But I am worried too.”

“The shop has many gas cylinders and the owner is always cooking.

“I am afraid if a fire breaks out, it can get out of control,” he added.

Safety always a priority

When contacted, DBKL Socio-economic Development executive director Anwar Mohd Zain said he was aware of the situation in

Salak South New Village, which was prevalent in most traditional villages in the city.

“But safety is always a priority in any business environment, and managing health and safety in business premises is crucial.

“Businesses have to do a risk assessment to find out the hazards in their workplace.

“They have to put in measures to control and mitigate the dangers to ensure workers are not at risk.

“So when you run a business from the home, it makes it all the more important to ensure that occupational safety and health requirements are complied with,” he stressed.

Anwar said DBKL could take into consideration whether a business was supporting the lifestyle or activities within the village community, such as a barber shop or sundry shop, but it would be difficult if it was a workshop or factory that was operating from the home.

“The very idea of a factory operating in a residential lot, for example a carpentry or spray paint business using heavy, noisy machinery as well as chemicals and solvents that pose health risks to those in the house and their neighbours... how can we allow or even justify that?” he questioned.

Anwar said DBKL needed to go back to the basics and look at the bigger picture in order to resolve the problem.

“It requires a re-examination of policies, planning and zoning laws,” he concluded.



A house with an extension onto the side lane, where a carpentry workshop operates. — Photos: LOW LAY PHON/The Star



Cheng Kow inside a carpentry workshop operating next to houses. He says poverty is still a major issue in the new village.



A resident has converted his home into a business premises making aluminium products.