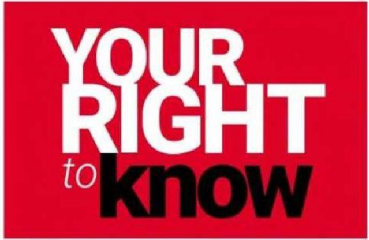




V. Saraswathi, 44, sits in front of her parents' 100-year-old wooden house; she is determined to stay in her childhood residential area. — Photos: YAP CHEE HONG/The Star



By BAVANI M and SHALINI RAVINDRAN
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EIGHTY-YEAR-OLD V. Ponni is one of the oldest remaining residents of Ladang Bukit Jalil, located near 6½ Mile, Jalan Puchong in Kuala Lumpur.

The former rubber estate bordering Selangor is one of two last remaining rubber estates in Kuala Lumpur. The other rubber estate is Ladang Bukit Kiara.

Ponni arrived at the estate as a child, and has spent her entire life in the area working as a rubber tapper, alongside many others who have toiled on the estate for decades.

While many families have moved out since the government acquired the estate land, Ponni and 41 other families are holding on to the hope that they would one day own permanent homes on the land where they have lived and worked for generations.

Looming threat

However, that hope is now under threat.

A government notice proposing degazettement of land where the estate is situated has raised concerns of potential redevelopment.

The lot in question also includes a Muslim cemetery and nearby Immigration depot.

For Ponni and other residents, this proposal only deepens their fear of displacement.

Community leaders from nearby Kampong Bohol in Kuala Lumpur and Kinrara in Puchong, are calling for transparency, urging residents to voice their con-

Losing the only home they’ve known

Former workers of KL’s Ladang Bukit Jalil fear being displaced by proposed degazettement



Elderly Ladang Bukit Jalil residents gather in front of their homes to discuss their situation.

cerns about the future of the land and their homes at a public hearing on Thursday.

On Oct 10, the Attorney General’s Chambers published a notice in the Federal Government Gazette, announcing the proposed revocation of land encompassing the former Ladang Bukit Jalil, the Muslim cemetery and Immigration depot, under Section 64(2) of the National Land Code.

Lot 45585, measuring 10.54ha or equivalent to 14 football fields, was designated for public use in 2009 and includes both the former rubber estate and burial ground.

The notice, signed by Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar, has sparked concerns among the residents and nearby stakeholders.

Colonial-era legacy

Ponni arrived at the estate at the age of eight with her father, Veral Kuppan.

Today, the widow and mother of five still lives in her late parents’ derelict home that was built during British rule.

Constructed in the early 1940s, the zinc-roofed house, with a small chimney, is emblematic of the architecture of the era.

Ponni’s parents, like many others at the time, were brought to the estate to work on the rubber plantation.

Her childhood friend Chelli Ramasamy, who was featured in a *StarMetro* report in 2012 asking for a low-cost house at the former estate land, died two years ago.

Ponni and Chelli were rubber tappers at the estate until it ceased operations in 1995.

At its peak, the estate housed over 250 families.

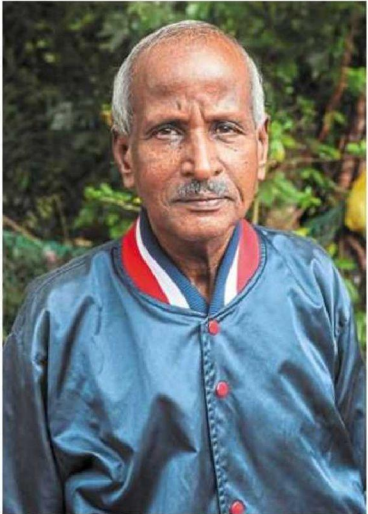
However, after the government acquired the land in 1980, and the subsequent closure of the estate in 1995, many families gradually moved out – some willingly, others reluctantly – accepting compensation and offers to rent units in nearby People’s Housing Projects (PPR).

Ponni, like Chelli’s daughter Shanti Rengasamy, 54, her husband P. Kathiravan, and their daughters Muhinthin, 27, and Rakchini, 25, continued to live on the estate grounds in their parents’ houses, holding on to hopes of owning homes in the area.

“I want to remain here where I’ve lived for five decades. Not in a PPR unit, but in the home I have lived in my whole life as a rubber tapper,” said Ponni.



Ponni holds up her birth certificate and IC as proof that she’s one of the oldest residents of Ladang Bukit Jalil.



Paramasivam: Government must include residents in whatever plan it has for this area.

Shanti said, “My mother led a difficult life, rising at dawn with only an oil lamp to guide her as she tapped rubber in the plantation.

“Her entire life, all she wanted was her own home. Instead, she lived in fear of losing her home until her death.”

Despite receiving repeated but unfulfilled promises from the government, the remaining families have been waiting for decades to secure permanent homes on the estate.

Residents, especially those still living on the former estate grounds, were alarmed after hearing about the government notice to degazette the Ladang Bukit Jalil land and its surroundings.

The land is only a stone’s throw from the Kampung Bohol Flood Retention Pond, which was recently sold to a developer for a housing project.

Residents fear the proposed degazettement could be another move to sell off land for a housing development.

Chasing the dream

The remaining families are calling on the government to build low-cost housing on the existing 1.6ha land which also has a Hindu temple.

Ladang Bukit Jalil Estate Workers’ Action Committee chairman K. Paramasivam said DBKL had in 2009 earmarked the estate houses for demolition, but this did not happen.

“If the government is degazetting the land for redevelopment, it must include us in whatever plan it has for this area.

“We have been fighting for our



StarMetro report on July 23, 2012.



The Muslim cemetery near Ladang Bukit Jalil is also earmarked in the degazettement exercise.

rights for 40 years, and we have met prime ministers and ministers but there is still no solution.”

In September 2018, the committee discussed the matter with then Federal Territories minister Khalid Abdul Samad, who had promised to look into their claims, but nothing came of it.

“We met with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim’s aide earlier this year and submitted all the necessary documents, and we are still waiting for a response,” said committee secretary K. Balakrishnan.

“All we are asking for is what’s rightfully ours – a place to call home on the land where we’ve lived and worked on for decades.

“We’re just asking for the dignity of owning what has always been promised to us.”

Save Kampung Bohol Flood Retention Pond pro-tem committee chairman Saniah Arabian, 64, worried about the land as it also involved a Muslim cemetery.

“Space constraints are a big issue in Kuala Lumpur, and as a resident living nearby, this new degazettement exercise is worrying,” Saniah said.

Pro-tem committee secretary Chin Chong Men, 76, said the degazettement exercise involved a significant portion of land and expressed concern over the situation similar to what happened with the Kampung Bohol pond land.

“We will attend the Oct 17 hearing. I am curious to hear what the plans are for this area.

“I find it suspicious that Ladang Bukit Jalil residents, who

Chronology of Ladang Bukit Jalil residents’ struggle		
1940	> Workers of Ladang Bukit Jalil, a 728.43ha estate that includes a rubber plantation, move into the area at 6½ Mile, Jalan Puchong, Bukit Jalil.	> DBKL issues a letter on Dec 29 stating that the temple, school and cemetery will not be relocated.
2011	> In February, during a meeting with then Federal Territories and Urban Well-being minister Raja Nong Chik, deputy minister M. Saravanan and Human Resources minister Datuk Dr S. Subramaniam, those who had worked in the rubber estate for more than 15 years are offered RM23,000 each while the rest are offered RM11,000 as compensation.	> DBKL issues notice that eviction and demolition will be done on March 15. Residents are urged to accept units at PPR Muhibbah.
1980	> The Federal Government, through the Federal Territories (FT)Ministry, acquires the estate using the Land Acquisition Act 1960.	> Estate residents then initiate legal action to stop DBKL from evicting them. The High Court strikes out the suit brought by estate residents on the grounds that they had filed the suit against the wrong party.
1988	> In September, the FT minister promises that the estate workers and their families can continue to reside at Ladang Bukit Jalil until low-cost homes are built for them.	> In July, resident representatives meet with then prime minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak. During the meeting, residents submit a request for 1.6ha of land to build houses.
1995	> Ladang Bukit Jalil ceases operations as a rubber estate.	> In October, residents are informed by Najib’s special officer that the land proposal is rejected, but offer of PPR units is maintained. A counter offer of 41 low-cost terrace houses on the original site is made by residents.
2007	> The former estate workers and their families are labelled as ‘squatters’ and served an eviction notice by Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) on July 16 under the Emergency (Essential Powers) Ordinance 1969 (Clearance of Squatters Regulations).	> On Dec 20, 2010, residents receive yet another eviction notice from DBKL to vacate the area under the Emergency Ordinance.
2007-2010	> Several eviction notices are issued to residents on Nov 2, 2007; May 12 & Dec 23, 2008; Dec 10, 2009 and May 19 & July 20, 2010.	> The government makes an offer of RM85,000 to former estate
Sources: News reports, PSM		

workers. There will be no terrace houses. The families reject the offer.

2018

> Resident representatives meet with new FT minister Khalid Abdul Samad.

2019

> On May 6, residents receive an eviction notice from Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur Lands and Mines Office (PTGWP). A few days later, Khalid announces that the notice is rescinded.

> During a meeting with Khalid on May 14, residents are informed that Ladang Bukit Jalil has been allocated as a burial site and Immigration depot.

2024

> Former Ladang Bukit Jalil workers committee representatives meet with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim’s special duties officer on the unresolved issues.

> On Oct 10, the Attorney General’s Chambers publishes a notice announcing the proposed revocation of land around the former estate and other lots under Section 64(2) of the National Land Code.



TheStargraphics

will clearly be affected by the degazettement, were not informed.

“We hope they won’t be displaced,” said Chin.

Save Kuala Lumpur Coalition chairman Datuk M. Ali said it was deeply concerning that not many people were aware of the

proposed degazettement, especially as it involved land affecting the Muslim cemetery and the former Ladang Bukit Jalil workers.

“The former estate workers are not squatters, they are residents who have worked hard all their lives and deserve to know

about the future of their homes.

“The government needs to be more transparent about this process.

“I strongly encourage residents to attend the hearing to fully understand what is happening and make their voices heard,” added Ali.