



Cramped: A child cycles past stacks of wood that could serve as a hiding place for snakes and other vermin.

Sentul squatters want to escape urban squalor

Floods, snakes and disease worsen their problems

By PRIYA MENON
priya@thestar.com.my

PSAROJA, 47, and her family are living in fear of their squatter house collapsing as the wooden structure is dilapidated and falling apart.

The house, in Kampung Sentul Pasar, KL, is home to the family of five but Saroja said she and her husband had been applying for a Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) flat since 1985, but to no avail.

According to her, her husband's family had been staying in the squatter area, which was built on land owned by Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB), for more than five decades.

"My children are all working and studying at the same time so none of us can afford a house at this point in time," she said.

There are about 20 families staying in the squatter area which also occupies DBKL and Keretapi Tanah Melayu Bhd (KTMB) reserve land. Most of the area is overgrown with creepers and it has become known as Kampung Ular or Snake Village to those living nearby.

Each week, the squatters are able to catch at least three large pythons in the area.

Walking through the settlement is also a harrowing task as one has to keep a look out for snakes, dogs, holes in the ground and waste from the nearby Sentul Market.

The drains in the area are clogged and many of the residents have been hit by dengue at least once in their lives.

The clogged drains contribute to the frequent flooding, which has already occurred twice this year.

Resident Appala, who has four children, is scared for their lives.

"There are no street lights at night and you can't see the snakes," he said.

"The DBKL only cleans the monsoon drain once a month and this contributes to the flooding," he added.



Falling apart: Vijaya Kumaran from the Batu MIC Youth having a closer look at one of the ramshackle houses in the settlement.

For Naidu and his neighbours, moving into DBKL flats would be a welcome relief as none can afford homes of their own. They would rather pay the rent and live on property they have paid for with dignity.

The squatter area also provides an opportunity for an unscrupulous man to make a quick buck.

According to residents, the man had built 10 houses in the area and rented out the shacks for up to RM300 a month.

MIC Sentul youth chief Morgan Veli said the MIC had been trying to vacate all the squatters in the area.

"Sentul is getting a new look. We have beautiful apartments and buildings coming up and yet the poor people in the area are being forgotten," he said.

Morgan and members of the Batu MIC Youth have joined forces to help the people and have been running back and forth from the DBKL offices looking for homes.

"We urge the government to give these people a chance," he said.



Left to rot: Several of the houses have been abandoned.