

No longer serving

More foreigners than Malaysians occupying

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their original purpose

low-cost flats at public housing project

FOR a public housing project (PPR) meant for low-income Malaysians relocated from squatter areas, the Damai Flats in Bandar Sunway has instead attained a very foreign face.

A large majority of the residents there are foreigners.

A Bahasa Malaysia daily in its report recently claimed that 80% of Damai Flats' occupants comprises people from Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Africa.

According to the report, some local residents feel fearful living amid so many foreigners and claim that these people create disturbance by hanging out below the flats till the wee hours, like to disturb women and are involved in vandalism.

StarMetro visited the flats in Jalan PJS 8/9 recently and witnessed groups of foreigners hanging out at mamak stalls, sitting on motorbikes, or simply standing near the lifts, chatting with one another.

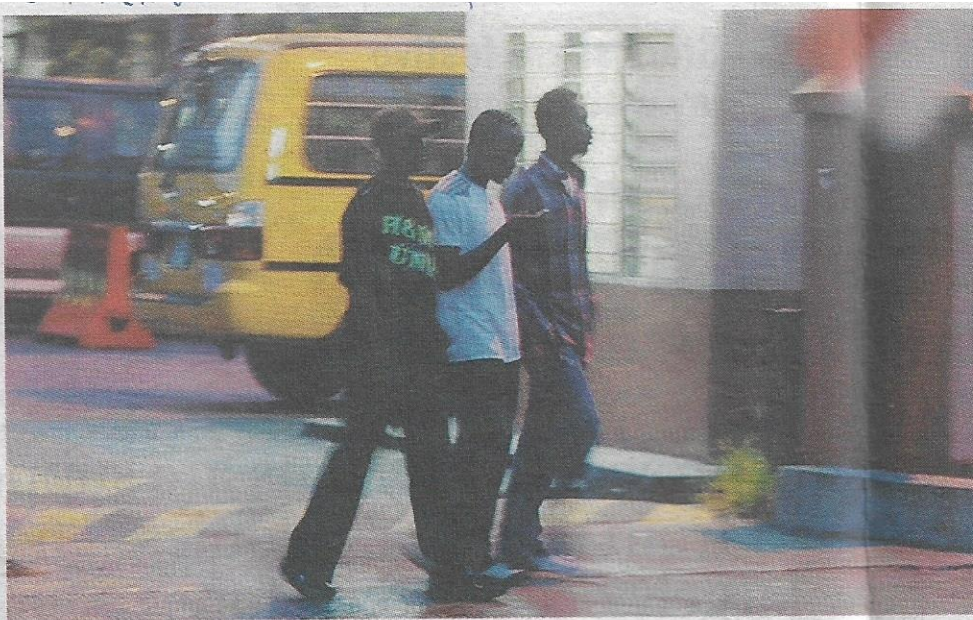
At least six of the eight people approached for interview said they were foreigners, mostly Indonesians.

Subaidi Hasan, who hails from Bandung, said: "I think locals should not be scared of us, because we have not created problems or trouble."

"I work in Puchong as a construction worker, and although my boss provides accommodation there, I prefer to rent a flat here as my children's babysitter lives nearby."

Subaidi, who has been renting the unit for the past six years, said locals probably felt uncomfortable seeing the foreigners *lepak* (hang out) below their flats.

Another Indonesian Hasan Ahmad,



Attracted to the stalls: Most of the Africans live in Mentari Court but they like to patronise the mamak stalls over at the Damai Flats.

»If they (owners) do not rent to foreigners, they have no one to rent the units to because Malaysians seek units with additional security features«

OMAR AHIM

who is a contractual house builder, also feels that Malaysian residents should not be wary of foreigners.

"Why should there be fear when we have done nothing? We are just here to make a living," he said.

Local bus driver Somasundram Subramaniam, who has been living at the flats for six years, said the flats

was peaceful even though 70% of its occupants were foreigners.

"No fighting has broken out among them to make us locals fearful of them," he said.

The number of foreigners at the flats also make no difference to businessman Yap Mou Ching who operates a sundry shop below his unit.

"Foreigners are everywhere now. It has become a norm, not just at Damai flats.

"I've been staying here for eight years now and I find that the situation is reasonably good. There has been no fights among the foreigners," said Yap.

"Contrary to the claims, I feel fine and safe in my home here. In fact, the reason the foreigners are hanging out below is probably because they are waiting for the lift to go up to their units. Of the two lifts here, one has not been operational for a few months now so there's only one left.

"The foreigners here are renting the flat units from Malaysian owners who do not stay here. The locals don't want to stay here anymore as they feel the place is dirty and uncomfortable," added Yap, whose wife is an Indonesian.

Damai Flats Residents Association

(RA) chairman Omar Ahim said he felt no fear about living at the flats because there had never been crimes like murder there.

"Some of the unit owners are retirees living on their pension. They need to rent out the units in order to pay off their loans.

"If they do not rent to foreigners, they have no one to rent the units to because Malaysians seek units with additional security features and we have none of that here.

"Ever since the nearby Mentari Court opened, local tenants prefer going there," said Omar.

"If there's anything serious, we would call the police from Sungei Way or RELA for help. I've noticed a drop in the number of occupants from Bangladesh now. Most of the Africans live in Mentari Court but they like to patronise the amak stalls over here," he said.

But I can understand that some residents do not feel at ease seeing the number of Indonesians who squat below the flats."

Omar said he has a committee to look into such issues but has not received any complaints from residents so far.

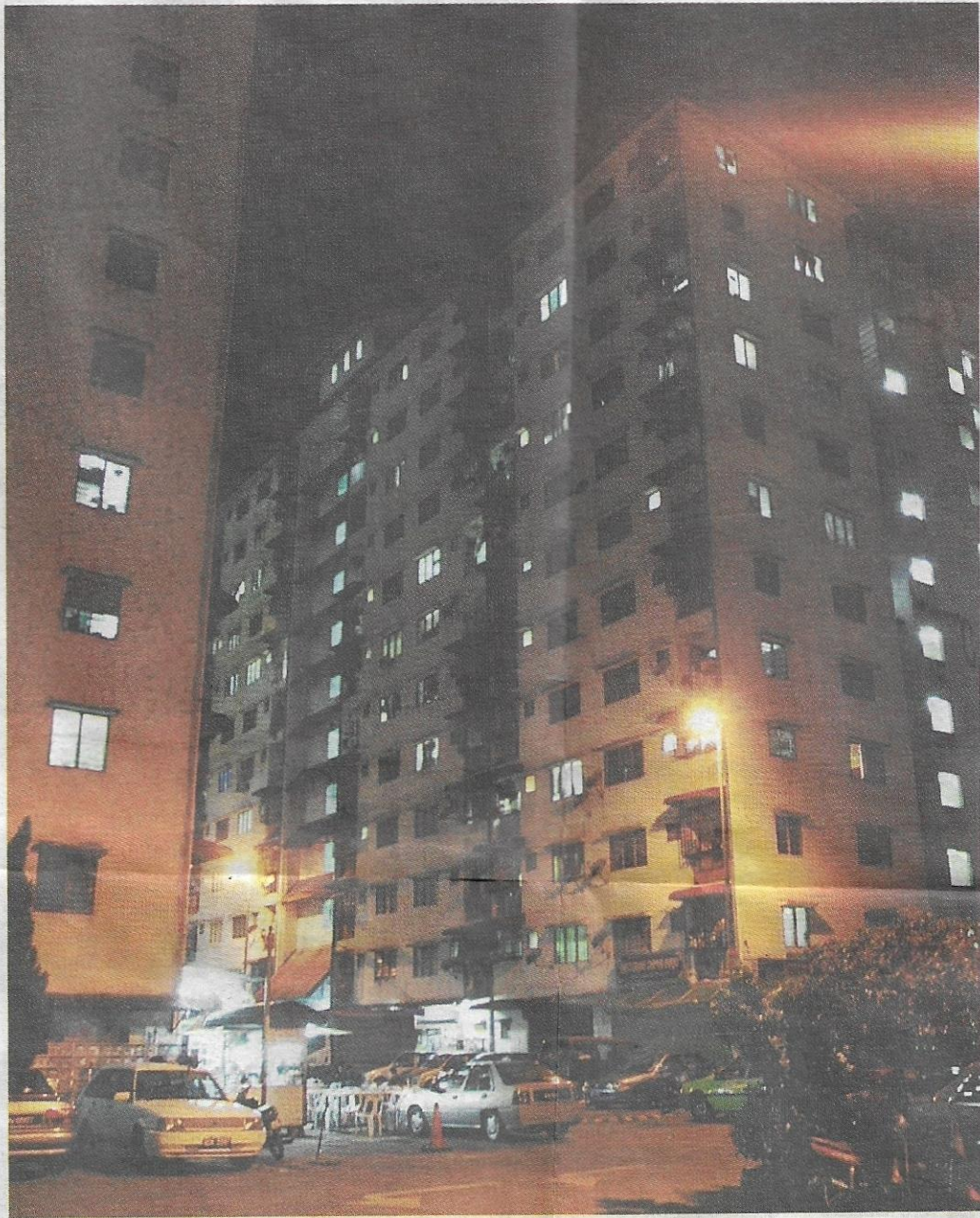
Melana Jaya MP Loh Seng Kok said he is not aware of the number of foreigners at the flats, but said if it was true, then it was not fair for house owners to just rent out their units to foreigners.

"People who have been allocated these units should stay here as the flats are meant for them.

"The police cannot take action unless the foreigners are found to have no permit.

"I urge the relevant authorities like the Immigration Department and Ministry of Human Resources to look into this issue, while factory owners should also provide own accommodation and hostels for their workers to stay in," said Loh.

Damai Flats is made up of over 700 units spread over three blocks of Block A, B, and C.



Home to more foreigners than locals: The PPR Damai Flats in Bandar Sunway with food stalls below.



Meeting place: The foreign residents gather below the flats to catch up on community gossip.