

Living with risk

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By PAULINE ALMEIDA

IN identifying areas that are prone to landslides following the Bukit Antarabangsa disaster recently, Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim said the dangerous slopes were located near housing areas in the Bukit Antarabangsa, Hulu Kelang, Lembah Jaya and Teratai State constituencies.

He said the authorities would continuously monitor these areas.

"However, we ask the Federal government, through the Public Works Department, to carry out more in-depth studies of the areas," he said.

Meanwhile *Malay Mail* surveyed some of the affected

areas and obtained responses from residents' representatives there.

1. Taman Bukit Segar Jaya Phase 1 is situated about 15 metres away from a forest. Residents' Association president Tan Get Song said there shouldn't be any development at the foothills now that Menteri Besar Khalid Ibrahim had identified it as one of the areas to be at risk of landslides.

There is a project comprising 15 to 18-storey condominium units, and nine bungalows, which was approved and slated for development on the hills behind the 171 houses.

"The plan was approved

four years ago. Now we don't know our fate. We are praying there is no development there," said Tan yesterday.

2. The chairman of Bukit Segar Jaya Phases Two and Three, Jonathan Woo, said the problem here is in the cutting of the slope, which is a valley, in order to build more houses. They are just a kilometre away from the forest reserve. "Given hillslope development has been found to be not safe, we leave it to the assessment of the experts for future projects," he said.

"And for that there should be a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment of the current and future profiling of the slope, including

Residents' associations against

its stability, based on the experience of Bukit Antarabangsa where the landslide took place," Woo added.

The *Malay Mail* had reported on July 22 that Bukit Sungai Putih Forest Reserve — the last green lung in Cheras — saw no success from residents' protests, complaints and appeals.

More than a decade after huge tracts of the reserve were degazetted, the area is now an enclave for high-end housing rather than the lush, hilly greenery that once attracted trekkers, hikers and joggers from all over the Klang Valley.

It is estimated that at least 290 acres of primary jungle have vanished to make way

for close to 1,000 bungalows and double-storey houses, not counting the shophouses, along Jalan SP2, Jalan Bukit Segar Jaya 2 and Jalan Bukit Segar Jaya.

Development is continuing in the area, at least in two places — one part of the primary jungle which is still being cleared for a "Bukit Hatamas" project, and another spot, a valley and former water catchment area, behind Jalan Koop Cuepacs 2 and Jalan Awana 1.

The catchment area has now been flattened to a large extent, and run-off drainage built on the slopes which are still quite steep.

3. A Taman Melawati Resi-

of landslide

more development

dents' Association, (TMRA) Kuala Lumpur, committee member said they are sceptical about the MB's statement, as tomorrow, developers can turn around and claim a certain project is safe, and there will be no follow through of the earlier stand.

"Then you can expect the authorities to change their mind, especially Ampang Jaya Municipal Council (MPAJ), which will have the power to approve or object a development. We are just hoping they would follow through with the hillslope guidelines to preserve Melawati Hills," the committee member said.

It was reported on Dec 9 that there was a possibil-

ity of a development on the hillslopes of Melawati Hill, which is on the same mountain range as Bukit Antarabangsa, Hulu Kelang, where the disaster occurred on Dec 6.

The residents are now desperate to save this hill from being flattened to make way for 152 bungalow lots on a 20-hectare site. Due to their objection, the matter involving the hills was referred to the Appeals Board of the State Government's office. At the hearing on Dec 17, the judge had ruled that the development in question be arbitrated at the MPAJ's One-Stop centre (OSC), a committee that makes decisions on project approvals within the am-

bit of the local authority.

This was because the development order had lapsed on Aug 30, 2008. But the developer had only applied for the renewal of the planning permission early this month, when it should have been done before the order had expired.

On another end, the other parts of the hill had already been cleared, they now feature exclusive residential projects like 20 Trees and Amberhill, which appear to be 50 per cent completed.

4. Peoples' Consultative Council for Ampang Jaya and Pandan adviser M. Thomas said the general populace

must be educated on housing at the foothills and density. "This will help when making house purchases in future," he said, adding that the current tragedy in Hulu Kelang has got a tremendous impact on people and no one is going to buy properties with hillview.

Thomas recalled in 2006 his stand on behalf of Hulu Kelang residents against massive development on the slopes in Hulu Kelang, following a soil expert's confirmation that 80 per cent of Hulu Kelang was at risk of landslides, did not yield any positive action.

"We never learnt, did we?," he reasoned, referring to the recent landslide disaster.

No takers for hillside properties

By MASAMI MUSTAZA

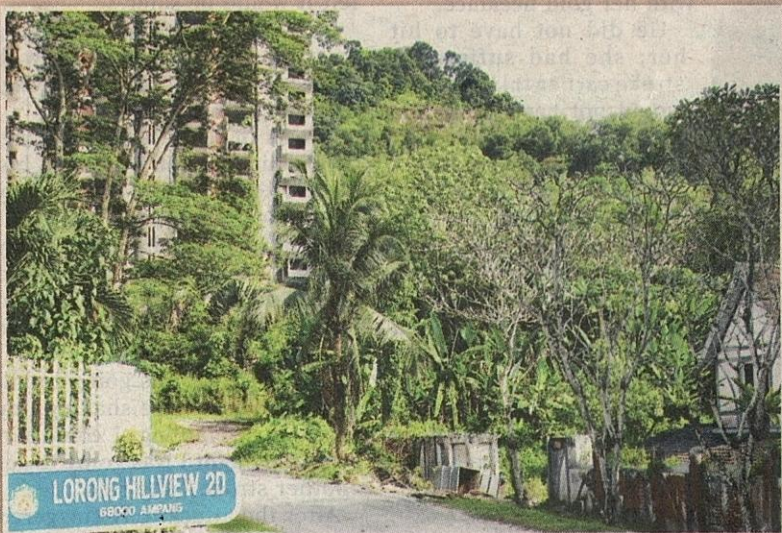
CHEAP sale. Hillside homes are going as low as 40 per cent below the market price, claim some local real estate agents.

"Houses auctioned the first time usually sell at a 10 per cent discount while houses auctioned the second time will go for less than 20 per cent. In regards to this, a 30 to 40 per cent reduction is really big but people are desperate to sell. However, these prices are still not able to attract investors because they know of the risk which comes with the purchase," said a Sunway-based real estate agent.

Along with this slump in prices is a drop in demand as well as a rise in owners looking to put their properties up for sale.

SOME AREAS AT RISK IN THE KLANG VALLEY

Pics: KHAIRULL AZRY BIDIN



Taman Hillview (Bukit Antarabangsa/Ampang)

Population: 265

Houses: 53

Description: An old and small enclave, not too far from Highland Towers. Boasts a mixed community comprising both locals and expatriates who live mainly in link houses

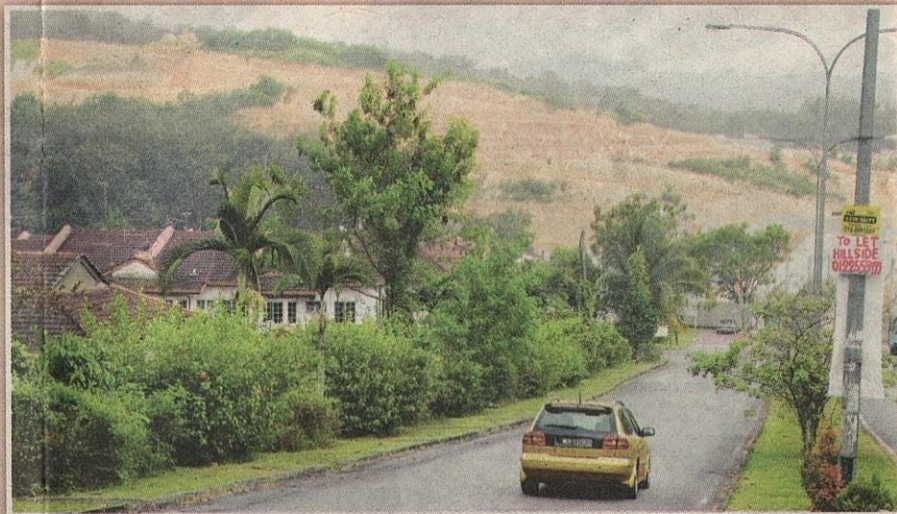


Ukay Perdana, Hulu Kelang

Population: 22,000

Houses: 4,365

Description: A mature housing site, where a new project calls for even more housing units on 90.55 acres of hillslope land



Taman Melawati, Hulu Kelang

Population: 28,545

Houses: 5,709

Description: Current projects under way, among others, are 20 Trees and Amberhill. Generally an upper middle income community



Dataran Ukay and Ukay Heights (Bukit Antarabangsa/Ampang)

Population: 11,245

Houses: 2,249

Description: Considered a "matured neighbourhood". About 10 per cent of the residents are expatriates. Mostly bungalows, double-storey and two-and-half-storey houses

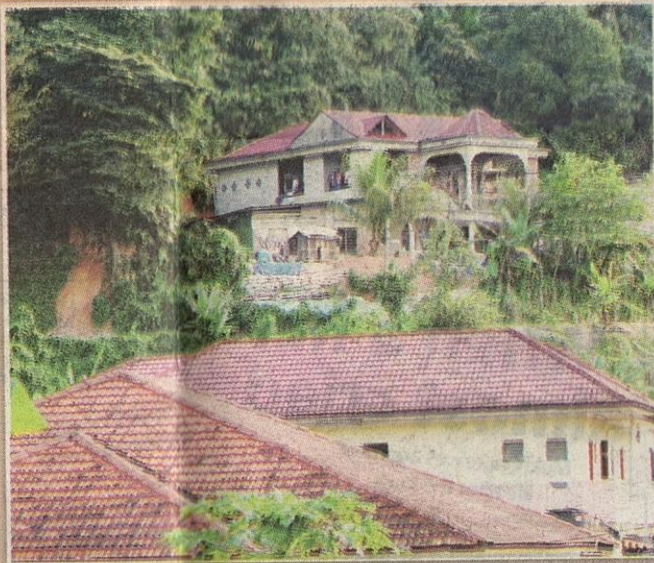


Taman Hijau, Ampang

Population: 280

Houses: 56

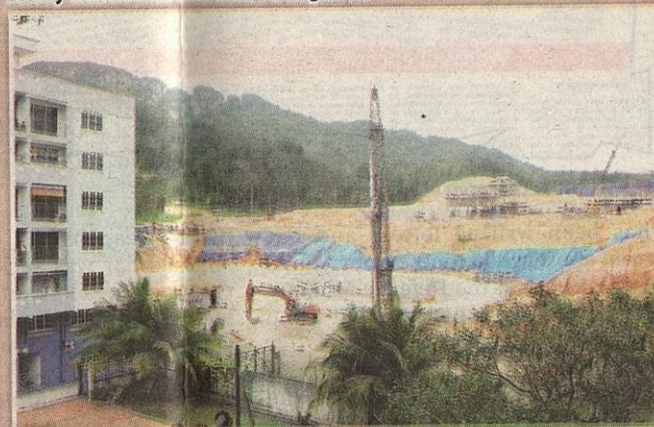
Description: Properties comprise double-storey terrace houses, single-storey houses and a few bungalows



Bukit Sungai Seputih, Cheras

Population: 3,000

Description: At risk areas are Taman Bukit Segar Jaya, Phases 1, 2 and 3, and Taman Cheras Hartamas. The neighbourhood features double-storey link houses and some bungalows



Taman Kemensah, popularly known as Kemensah Heights, Hulu Kelang

Population: 570

Houses: 114

Description: An upcoming exclusive neighbourhood described as a "good place to live". The area mainly has bungalows and semi-detached houses worth between RM1.5 million and RM2 million

for sale.

The agent notes that he has been receiving fewer inquiries on hillside properties since the massive landslide at Bukit Antarabangsa while more people with hillside properties are looking for prospective buyers.

It is not all bad news for sellers though. Unfortunately, he adds, people have a habit of forgetting as time passes.

"After five years, you'll see people buying property in the risky areas again because although the price of the property may go up, it will still be less than the original market price by 10 to 20 per cent."

A real estate agent who has been in the business since the days of the Highland Tower incident also observed that properties at or nearest to ground zero experienced difficulty finding prospective buyers. Some houses adjacent to the Highland Tower disaster were put on sale but have remained vacant till today.

"The funny thing is people tend to forget about all these issues after a while, so they will still come back to these areas to buy property. Those who remember may actually use that to their advantage and demand for more discounts from the owner. Sometimes, there are those who do not mind the risk as long as they like the property and the price is cheap," he said.

He has observed that of late, more people are looking to sell off their hillside homes. In his opinion, however, the slide in value is dependent on where the property is located and how badly affected the area is.