



Historical discovery: Ancient furnaces for smelting iron that were unearthed at Jeniang by researchers from USM's Centre for Global Archaeological Research two weeks ago.

Bujang Valley larger than thought

Expert: It's three times the size of Penang island

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GEORGE TOWN: The Bujang Valley civilisation in Merbok, Kedah, might have been twice as big as what it was originally thought to be, according to new findings by a team of researchers from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

Team leader Assoc Prof Dr Mokhtar Saidin said that following the discovery of ancient furnaces for iron smelting two weeks ago in Jeniang, the size was now estimated to be 35km in radius compared to 15km in radius before.

"This means the Bujang Valley civilisation area encompassed about 1,000sq km - three times the size of Penang island - and not 400 sq km as thought before," he told a press conference here yesterday.

He said the southern area of the civilisation still stretched from Merbok to Bukit Mertajam but the eastern side which previously ended at the North-South Highway now stretches till Jeniang.

Mokhtar said a team of eight researchers from the Centre for Global Archaeological Research found the furnaces in Jeniang, which is about 30km from Bujang Valley.

He said the team, which conducted excavations from February 2009 to May this year found complexes such as ritual sites and industries of early civilisation in Bujang Valley which was based on the iron industry.

"We excavated 10 sites along Sungai Batu in Bujang Valley and found evidence that furnaces was used by the ancient civilisation," he said.

After dating samples of iron smelting sites, he said an early civilisation which was probably based on animism existed there between the first and fifth century.

But from the fifth century to the 14th century, the area was a thriving Hindu and Buddhist civilisation, he added.

It had been reported that archaeologists had unearthed temple ruins and artefacts dating back to more than 1,500 years there.

In a related matter, Mokhtar said an international conference on "Bujang Valley and Early Civilisations" in South-East Asia would be held at Royale Chulan Hotel in Kuala Lumpur from July 5 to July 7.

It is organised by the centre and the Department of National Heritage of Malaysia.

He said 28 academic papers would be presented by archaeologists from South-East Asian countries as well as from China, India, United States and Britain.