Unit Komunikasi Korporat

KERATAN AKHBAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	SUNDAY STAR			
TARIKH	:	15/12/2019	MUKA SURAT	:	2
JABATAN	:	JPS / BANJIR			
KLASIFIKASI	:	**PERHATIAN**			

Nightmare from above

Tanjung Kupang resident recalls unforgettable plane crash

JOHOR BARU: Come December, retiree Sulaiman Othman will recall the ill-fated Malaysian Airlines System Flight 653 (MH653) that crashed into a mangrove forest in Tanjung Kupang 42 years ago.

The 71-year-old grandfather said he was a young man when he saw the commercial plane flying past him on that fateful night on Dec 4, 1977.

"I was with four of my friends looking for prawns at around 8.30pm among the mangrove trees when the plane just went past us.

"We did not think anything of it because it was normal to see commercial planes flying in the airspace here as it is the route to Singapore, but there was something different about that particular plane," he said.

Sulaiman recalled that he could hear noises coming from the plane and a few minutes later, there was a loud explosion which shook the ground and a burst of light followed soon after.

He and his friends initially thought the Singapore army was doing their usual military exercise not far from Tanjung Kupang.

"Then some documents, including airplane tickets, started to float into the mangroves where my friends and I were," he said.

"Out of curiosity, we decided to go towards the light, which was less than a kilometre away, and became the first group of people to see the wreckage. It was a horrible sight," he added.

The plane was burning and was broken into several pieces, and its parts were scattered all over the mangrove forest.

What was more gruesome for him was seeing human remains, Sulaiman said.

"I found several hands and heads of the victims stuck on trees and on the ground. The area was wet because of blood and oil coming from the plane."

He said that two Singapore army helicopters were the first to arrive, and the Malaysian police, ambulances and fire engines came much later as the road to Tanjung Kupang was not good, unlike now.







Fatal flight: A Tanjung Kupang villager pointing to where the plane crashed 42 years ago. (Below) A plaque to commemorate the victims of the crash.

Incident One

Date: 4 Dec 1977
Place: Tanjung Kupang, Johor
Nature of disaster: Air crash from apparent hijacking
Total loss of lives: 100

Another witness, restaurant owner Mohd Sham Mohd Din, 62, vividly recalled that he was watching a Malay movie titled *6 Jahanam* at an open air cinema in Gelang Patah town when he heard sirens from ambulances and fire engines passing by on the way to the crash site that day.

"Coming back from the cinema, I could see a large crowd of onlookers and police cordoned off the area where, my father told me, a plane had just crashed.

"It took the authorities about three days to salvage the plane from the mangroves and collect all the human parts, which were placed in black garbage bags," he said.

Mohd Sham added that his father operated a sundry shop and did not allow rescue workers to go inside because they had a very bad stench due to collecting human parts.

"I will never forget that date and whenever Dec 4 arrives, I would put a message in my WhatsApp group asking my friends and relatives to remember all 100 victims on that plane," he said.

The MH653 crash site is now thickly forested. The area, which is owned by the Johor Port Authority, has a sign warning that trespassers would be prosecuted.

The remains of the victims, 93 passengers and seven crew members, were buried in a grave known as the Tanjung Kupang memorial in Jalan Kebun Teh here.

Among the victims were the first Cuban ambassador Mario Garcia Inchaustegui and his wife Gladys.

Other names etched on the memorial include then Agriculture Minister Datuk Ali Ahmad and Public Works Department head Datuk Mahfuz Khalid.

The crash is believed to be the deadliest aviation disaster to happen in the country.

Ex-residents: Commemorate Towers tragedy

KUALA LUMPUR: Two abandoned buildings stand at the site of Highland Towers, a grim and sombre reminder of the worst housing tragedy the nation has seen.

The apartment blocks in Ulu Klang previously played home to a warm and close-knit community, residents say, but now its decrepit facade is a ghost of its former self.

Years have passed since the collapse of Tower One on Dec 11, 1993, but former residents want the tragedy to be commemorated.

Former Highland Towers Residents Committee secretary Chan Keng Fook, 62, said the event was a "milestone event in Malaysia's history".

In light of plans to redevelop the area into a recreational park, Chan hopes there would be some way to pay tribute to the 48 people who were killed there.

Among those who died were the son and daughter-in-law of former deputy prime minister Tun Musa Hitam, Carlos Rashid and Rosina Abu Bakar.

"For me, it doesn't matter what they redevelop the site into, but one thing they must not do is to let this be forgotten.

"The tragedy must be remembered, and action must be taken to ensure that this kind of event does not happen again," Chan said.

Last month, Ampang Jaya Municipal Council president Datuk Abdul Hamid Hussain said it was still waiting for directions from the government before proceeding with redevelopment plans.

Chan recalled the community spirit among the residents, especially the children.

"The children used to go and play with each other and they ran around the whole complex. They lived in different blocks but they went to the same school," he said.

Chan urged for developers to be longsighted and responsible when drawing up development plans.

"Construction has got to be done in a responsible manner, and in a way that does not pose a danger to residents. You never know what will happen in the next five or even 20 years..

"The building was built in the 1980s but it was 10 years down the road before Tower One collapsed," said Chan, who himself used to work for a property developer.

Another former resident, Dr Iain Gray, said there should be a permanent memorial for the victims of the tragedy.

"Even if they want to build something beautiful (at the site) out of a tragic situation, at least show that these people are not forgotten.

"It was a special community there, everybody knew each other," said the 74-year-old architect and master planner.

He recalled the chaos and trauma that ensued after the tower collapsed, but he also remembered how the Malaysian community rallied to assist rescue efforts in any way possible.

"All Malaysians came together to help, there was no looking at race, creed or colour. Everyone just worked together to try to do their little bit," said Gray, who was part of the rescue team for 12 days.

Robert Kennedy, whose family resided in the vicinity at the time, said the site was a picture of great suffering and disaster after the landslide.

"My aunt, who was living here, said there was a foul stench. For a few months, the smell was very bad," he said.

Kennedy, who currently lives in Taman Hillview near the site, said the once-stately condominium had been having unwanted visitors in recent years.

"There used to be teenagers who would come every Saturday night in big groups of 20 to 30 people. They made a lot of noise in the middle of the night.

"The residents used to be able to take a walk inside the building, but now it has been sealed up," he said when met near his house.

A visit to the site showed that the security has been tightened, as the abandoned buildings have been boarded up and non-residents need to present an authorised letter before entering the area.



Incident Two

Date: 11 Dec 1993
Place: Taman Hillview, Ulu Klang, Ampang
Nature of disaster: Building collapse due to landslide
Total loss of lives: 48

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Mother of disabled child fears fast-flowing floodwater

PETALING JAYA: After experiencing the worst flood of the century in Kelantan five years ago, Salihah Harapan Abdullah fears fast-flowing floodwater now, as it would endanger the life of her bedridden 12-year-old daughter Natasha Mohd Zailani.

Other children can wade their way to safety by holding on to something.

But my daughter is totally reliant on others to carry her because she can hardly move. She is suffering from cerebral palsy.

"It can be very dangerous carrying her while wading through fast-flowing water. She tends to get fits every now and then. I dread thinking about losing my balance while carrying her through fast-flowing water," she said.

Salihah, 39, pointed out that there were no drains in her village in Pasir Tumboh, Kelantan.

"When it rains non-stop, my house in Kampung Kubang Keranji in Pasir Tumboh will be flooded immediately.

"In recent years, we have seen massive development in the surrounding area, and we are suffering as a result because there has been no initiative to improve the drainage system. We have to put up with stagnant water every time it rains for hours.

"I really hope the authorities would do something. I hope they do not wait until a major disaster occurs before taking action," she said.

The massive 2014 flood in Kelantan was described as "tsunami-like" because it left villages and even townships in ruin, and scores of houses were flattened, especially in Kuala Krai district.

It was also dubbed the yellow flood because of high mud content.

The worst floods in Kelantan that occurred in the last century were recorded in 1926 and 1967.

Salihah, a mother of six children aged between six and 20, fears the worst as the floodwater appeared to be "flowing at a faster pace" lately.

"Water gushed into my house this week. My kitchen is still flooded, but we are staying put.

"In the past, every time floodwater rushed into the house, we would immediately rush to the *dikir barat* stage because Natasha was then sleeping on the floor.

"But now, we have bought a bed for her so we do not have to rush to the stage."

Incident Three

Date: 17 Dec 2014
Place: Kelantan
Nature of disaster: Massive floods dubbed Bah Kuning
Total loss of lives: 13
Total victims displaced: Over 202,000



Painful memories: The Highland Towers disaster.



Water woes: (Top) Rescuers in boats at Kg Kuala Nal after devastating floods crippled the area. (Right) Azizah Said, 76, watching her kids playing in floodwaters outside her home in Kg Keroh, Kuala Krai.

Timely phone call saved coconut drink stall seller's mum

GEORGE TOWN: Never having heard of a tsunami, M. Govindoo recalled standing and staring at the water subsiding as she stood at her son's drink stall that fateful morning on Dec 26, 2004, when the first wave hit the shore in Teluk Bahang.

"I was just standing at the stall by the seaside and serving drinks to tourists. I did not know what was going on but I did not think it would be serious enough to be afraid.

"I called my son who was heading to town to buy more coconuts for our stall. He told me to run to safety.

"At that moment I realised the wave had hit the hills nearby and was coming towards us I screamed at those by the beach and ran to the main road. As I reached the main road, the water reached my calves," the 82-year-old related during an interview at her house in Teluk Bahang.

That Boxing Day disaster claimed 52 lives in Penang, 12 in Kedah, two in Perak and one in Selangor.

Many of those who died in Penang were picnickers and children.

Govindoo, who was 67 back then, said she would not have moved away from the stall if her son had not told her to run.

"It is something I thought about sometimes. I was not afraid at all as I did not know such a thing was possible," she said.

Govindoo's son S. Sivanathan, 54, said he ran the small stall from 1994 until a few years ago.

"It was a small stall under a big tree by the beach in Teluk Bahang. When the tsunami hit, we lost everything except for the cart as I had chained it to the tree.

"We did not lose much but it took me six months to recover and start over. The thought that my mother might have perished haunted me. Every year we give thanks and pray for those who lost their lives," he said.

Another victim, A. Suppiah, is still haunted by memories of the tsunami 15 years after it happened.

"I am reminded of it every other day and I pray every day that it would not recur.

"It is just daunting sometimes, knowing that the tsunami almost killed my daughter and that there could be other disasters in the future," he said.

His daughter Thulaashi was only 22 days old when the deadly tsunami hit the cafe along the Miami Beach shoreline.

She was sleeping on a mattress when a giant wave carried it out to sea, but a second wave brought it back 30 minutes later.

Suppiah, 70, said seeing his daughter every day is a blessing.



Incident Four

Date: 26 Dec 2004
Place: Coastal areas in Penang
Nature of disaster: Tsunami due to Indian Ocean earthquake
Total loss of lives: 52 (15 others also perished in three other states)

Crashing down: A shed destroyed by waves that hit coastal areas in Tanjung Tokong, Penang.