

Doctors reach out to orang asli

Voluntary corp to help build 50 houses for community in Chenderiang

TAPAH

story by
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THE Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) Voluntary Corp is planning to construct 50 houses for the orang asli community at Chenderiang in Tapah.

Its chairman, Prof Dr Lekhraj Rampal, said the houses would be built in phases within the next two years in 40 different villages.

Prof Lekhraj, who is also a consultant epidemiologist in Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, said the cost of each house is between RM9,000 and RM10,000.

He said MMA paid for the materials needed to build the houses, while the orang asli community carried out the construction.

The project is an initiative between Chenderiang assemblyman Datuk Dr Mah Hang Soon, MMA and UPM.

"UPM's architecture students designed the houses based on the needs of orang asli families.

"The MMA approved RM130,000 for the project, which also includes medical camps and building of the houses.

"We want to reach out to the orang asli, help them, and make them feel that they are part of society and that they are not marginalised," he said after the official launch of four completed houses at the Batu 16 orang asli village in Tapah last weekend.

Also present were Dr Mah, MMA president Dr Ashok Philip, MMA past president Datuk Dr N.K.S Tharmaseelan and other committee members.

There are 10 houses located in the village, and so far, four houses have been completed.

Prof Lekhraj said the orang asli community prefer wooden

stilt houses instead of concrete structures. He said they feel traditional houses were more comfortable and airy, and therefore the architects from UPM came up with the designs for the houses after many discussions with all parties concerned.

He also said the project would continue to engage, encourage and empower the community.

Citing an example of the village chief of Batu 16, Rose Bah Ranvih, who had helped in the construction of the houses at his village, Prof Lekhraj said with the experience gained Rose would be able to train heads of other villages.

Prof Lekhraj said a de-worming exercise would also be carried out for the orang asli children in September.

Dr Mah said he was thankful to all involved in the construction of the houses.

He said the government allocated funds for the Housing Project for the Hardcore Poor (PPRT), but the orang asli community preferred to stay in houses they grew up in.

He said the cost of the PPRT houses is generally higher, and the idea to come up with different designs is definitely a brilliant idea.

"In time to come, the government and the Department of Orang Asli Development can use the concept as their model for future development," he added.

Rose, 46, said he felt lucky that his village was chosen for the project.

"I don't want to stay in a building constructed from cement, but in the type of house that I was born and brought up in.

"Most of the orang asli families don't like to stay in modern houses, as they prefer to stay in traditional ones," he added.

Another community member, Bah Jol Bah Dek, 45, said he was very happy that his house had been refurbished.

"Now my six children and my wife can stay comfortably in the house, compared to our old dilapidated structure," he added.





1 Chenderiang assemblyman Datuk Dr Mah Hang Soon (back row, eighth from left), The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) Voluntary Corp chairman Prof Dr Lekhraj Rampal (10th from left) and other committee members posing for photographs with the orang asli homeowners and their families, who are currently staying in their newly refurbished homes.

2 Dr Mah (left) and Prof Lekhraj (third from right) congratulating some of the homeowners. Looking on is MMA president Dr Ashok Philip (centre).

3 Some of the orang asli families eagerly awaiting the arrival of the VIPs to their village in Batu 16 in Tapah.

4 Some of the orang asli children at Batu 16 village in Tapah all excited about the newly renovated homes.

5 Children can't wait to move into their newly renovated homes.

6 One of the four refurbished houses at the orang asli village in Batu 16.

7 Dr Mah being asked to sprinkle water on the entrance to Batu 16 village tok batin Rose a/l Ranvih's newly refurbished house for him and the rest to stay in the house peacefully. Looking on is Prof Dr Lekhraj.

Photos: RONNIE CHIN