

HARD LIVING

ORANG ASLI SCAVENGE AT DUMPSITE FOR EXTRA CASH

No one forces us to collect recyclables, says villager

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THE usually quiet Kampung Bukit Biru Orang Asli settlement near Muadzam Shah here became the centre of attention over the weekend after reports emerged that Orang Asli villagers had been scavenging at a landfill in Jalan Bukit Ibam to make a living.

Four-wheel-drives and large groups of people, including outsiders, have descended on the settlement, where 15 families from the Jakun tribe live, and the landfill, where villagers were spotted resting under a hut.

The afternoon heat was unbearable when the *New Straits Times*

arrived at the landfill. A foul stench filled the air whenever a breeze blew across the site.

Mahmud Mohd Dom, 55, is part of a group of Orang Asli families who go to the landfill daily to search for recyclables, pack them into black plastic bags and sell them to a middleman.

He said recyclables were placed in different bags for plastic, glass and aluminium and arranged near the huts, where villagers rest during hot afternoons.

"Many Orang Asli come here daily to find recyclables, but only seven families come to the landfill regularly. Although we still go into the jungle to hunt or find forest products, like petai, we come here to collect recyclables for extra income.

"There's no fixed income. Sometimes, we earn only a few ringgit a week. During good times, we can bring home RM50 to RM60. We do other jobs, but this allows us to earn quick cash," he said, adding that he had been scavenging at the



Villagers scavenging for recyclables at a dumpsite near Kampung Bukit Biru, Muadzam Shah, yesterday.
PIX BY T.N. ALAGESH

landfill since 2018.

Mitah Kialong, 50, who has been collecting from the landfill for 14 years, said previously, about 60 people from nearby villages would search the landfill for recyclables.

However, she said, many people had moved away to find jobs and only she and a few others relied on the landfill to earn money.

"We are not forced by anyone to work at the landfill. It's just a routine for us. A lot of people have been visiting us since yesterday (Saturday), claiming that there are issues with us working at the site, but we have never disturbed anyone and even the landfill contractor allows us to go in."

She brushed aside claims that children were forced to work at the site, saying they only followed adults to the site and they get excited when they find toys.

"Children are not allowed to work at the site. They only come

here for fun. The Orang Asli here are only trying to get *rezeki halal* (a lawful livelihood).

"Sometimes, villagers from other settlements, including Kampung Simpai, Langkap, Kedaik and Ibam, would drop by. Everyone wants extra income," she said, adding that no one spends the night at the huts near the landfill.

She said after news about the landfill came out, there had been rumours that the landfill's operator would no longer allow Orang Asli to enter the site, which could affect their livelihood.

"We have not done anything wrong. Maybe the operator can fence up the area and offer us jobs to separate recyclables."

Jamida Jalong, 50, said his village, which he moved to in 2010, was 500m from the landfill and had a shortcut to the site.

He said he collected recyclables

at the landfill for several years before quitting in 2014 after being advised to do so by the health authorities.

"We do not have proper equipment and collect (rubbish) with our hands, so I quit and took up other village jobs.

"The authorities, including Jakoa (Orang Asli Development Department), remind those working there about safety and the threats to our health.

"Working at the dumpsite is a choice. Even those who receive Jakoa's oil palm dividends work at the site for quick cash.

"Many people have worked at the site, but the numbers have dropped. These days, only about 20 people work there."

On Friday, a portal reported on the deplorable living conditions of the Orang Asli at the village here, including children playing at the landfill.

'Once gazetted, village can get paved roads, water and electricity'



Orang Asli villager Jamida Jalong stands in front of a hut made of wood and canvas that villagers use to rest in after they scavenge at the dumpsite near Kampung Bukit Biru, Muadzam Shah.

ROMPIN: The Pahang Orang Asli Development Department (Jakoa) will help the Orang Asli in Kampung Bukit Biru, near Muadzam Shah here, get the village gazetted as an Orang Asli native village.

Its director, Johari Alwi, said the village did not have basic amenities like paved roads, clean water and electricity supply as it was categorised as a splinter village.

"Villagers have requested that the settlement be gazetted as a permanent village. Once it receives approval, it will be easy to provide them with basic amenities. Jakoa is making arrangements with the headquarters to provide water supply to the village.

"Villagers have asked Jakoa to provide aid so that their children can attend school. I believe once they move to a safe place, we can

provide transportation to school," he said at a dumpsite in Jalan Bukit Ibam near here yesterday.

The dumpsite near Kampung Bukit Biru made headlines after a portal reported about the deplorable living conditions of the Orang Asli, including children playing at the landfill and villagers not having water and electricity supply.

Johari said Jakoa would help villagers move to housing projects under the Hardcore Poor Housing Programme in the area.

He said the Regent of Pahang Tengku Hassanal Ibrahim Alam Shah Al-Sultan Abdullah had been briefed on Orang Asli here and he believed that aid would be given soon.

He urged people and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

wishing to help the Orang Asli to work with Jakoa.

"We welcome NGOs to help the Orang Asli and are prepared to work with them, but it would be better if they check with us before releasing statements on the community.

"How they interpret the situation may not be what is happening on the ground. We are not accusing them of any wrongdoing, but it's best we work together.

"They must understand that the Orang Asli are a sensitive community, so they (NGOs) should not be too aggressive when making remarks. NGOs have been providing a lot of help to Orang Asli."

Johari said Orang Asli villagers working at the landfill had been advised on safety measures and were aware of the health risks.