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Feature

# Managing Changes in Tanjung Tokong

by Nidhal Mujahid



# Amid Penang's new skyscrapers and the ubiquitous sea lies a village that is like no other.

It is one of the oldest villages in Penang. Known as Mukim 18, Tanjung Tokong was already a fishing settlement decades before Francis Light came to Penang.

“A long time ago, fishermen from Tanjung Tokong were already recognized for their traditional methods of large catches using fish traps like jermal and rumbia. These methods are no longer practised nowadays,” says Mohd Ishak Abdul Rahman, a fisherman who lives in the area.



*Fishmongers at the Tanjung Tokong morning market.*

Besides fishery, Tanjung Tokong also thrives on economic activities such as agriculture and micro businesses: in particular, food. Along Jalan Tanjung Tokong Lama, one finds traditional Malay cuisine such as various kueh-mueh, and of course nasi campur with its rich coconut milk-infused gravy and fresh seafood. The spot is understandably a centre of attraction during breakfast and lunch.

For decades, Kampung Tanjung Tokong was a sleepy village. Everything changed in the 1970s: then-Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak aimed to develop the Malay economy by tapping into Kampung Tanjung Tokong's potential to become a developed place. The Urban Development

Authority of Malaysia (UDA) in 1971 worked out a strategic master plan for developing Tanjung Tokong.

In the 1980s then-Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamed also gave UDA a mandate to develop the village. “Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim as the deputy prime minister of Malaysia at that time went to the ground to persuade the community to let UDA develop the area, and residents could in the meantime live in temporary houses provided by the government,” says Khatijah Bee, a resident.

The first phase was known as “Flat 16”, and this was in the 1980s. However, housing was unsatisfactory for the many large families; the flats had only two rooms per unit. According to Musanniff Zainuddin, a representative of the Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK), and spokesman of Suara Penduduk Kampung Tanjung Tokong, “The verbal agreement between developer and resident wasn’t clear and had in all probability been manipulated. In addition, the monetary compensation by the developer to some families was insufficient.”

It came as no large surprise then when the villagers voted overwhelmingly for Pakatan Rakyat in the 2008 elections, against the BN government that in the eyes of the villagers had been plotting with the developer against them.



*A temporary house.*

“It is not about which side of political fence you are sitting on; the most important thing is whoever is in government should have the commitment to solve the issues that have been shackling Tanjung



Tokong residents for decades,” says Umar, Musanniff’s brother.

“With the Penang state government’s policy, residents can breathe a sigh of relief – the developer cannot easily remove the residents of the area with merely a small compensation or with small temporary houses for large families; the developer should instead give a quota for the family to own an affordable house in the same location. Moreover, the transit houses initiated by the state executive councillor in charge of the Housing and Town and Country Planning Committees Jagdeep Singh Deo and built by UDA have received positive responses from the inhabitants,” says Musanniff.

What is worrying is the status of affordable housing for residents in the temporary transit houses. “It has been almost ten years,” says Umar.

But that’s not the end of Tanjung Tokong’s troubles: recently, fishermen in the area carried out a peaceful demonstration against land reclamation activities involving a rock wall out at sea. According to Ishak, “The project affects fishing activities and also the harbour; waste sediment is trapped on the beach, destroying the habitat of fish fry.”

While the rock wall espouses innovative technology, the fishermen opine that it is not well planned. “We (the fishermen) do not have a problem at all with the rapid development and modernisation near the Tanjung Tokong sea shore,” says Ishak, “but under any circumstances, the developer should discuss with us when they want to build something that will affect our fishing activities and the marine ecosystem. While compensation was given by the developer during the last Aidilfitri celebrations – about RM15,000 for the affected fishermen – it is a short-term solution; the more important thing is the continuous ability for us to go to sea.” Ishak recommends that the involved parties provide the fishermen with bigger boats to enable them to catch fish farther out at sea, away from the development and land reclamation.

## **DNA for Do-it-Together**



*Masjid Tuan Guru is located near a Chinese temple.*

While the landscape may be in flux, some things never change, such as the spirit of togetherness found in the residents. “Many annual events such as religious speeches and Aidilfitri and Aidiladha celebrations will be joined by numerous volunteers, helping make the events a success,” says Khatijah. “Even in the event of a death, villagers will volunteer to help the family of the deceased without asking for payment.”

Mohamed Bakri Mohamed Said, an active member of the Tanjung Tokong Residents’ Association, agrees with Khatijah: “There are many volunteer organisations such as the residents’ association, neighbourhood group, Persatuan Qaryah Masjid Tok Guru, JKKK and so on, who monitor and mobilise the community to help with the annual events.”

Tanjung Tokong is also a melting pot. At the morning market, “uncles” of various races can be seen lounging and chatting. The spirit of multiculturalism is also physically evident: a mosque is situated across from a Chinese temple. “That is no issue between us,” says Bakri, who is also a committee member of the Penang Chefs Association. “The temple community freely shares their parking space with us during Aidilfitri and Aidiladha.”

While the urbanisation and increased commercial activities in the area may benefit the local community in terms of business and livelihood, a balance must be sought so that development will be to everyone’s advantage.



## Nidhal Mujahid

is just an ordinary man who works as an analyst at Penang Institute.

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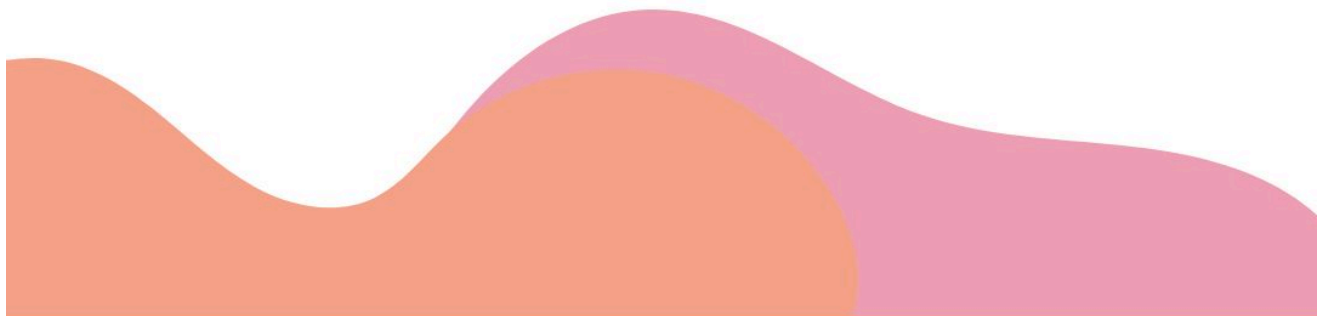
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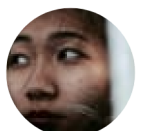
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