

Going back to kampung days

A village will be built in Johor to introduce youth here to a more rustic way of life

■ BY THERESA TAN

WORRIED about children who are growing up hooked on television and computer games and have no contact with Mother Nature, two men are aiming to develop a kampung in Johor to introduce Singapore's youth to a more rustic way of life.

Mr Jack Sim, founder of the World Toilet Organisation, which promotes clean toilets and sanitation, is offering his 4ha plot of land in Johor – at a nominal \$1 rent a year – for the non-profit project, called Kampung Temasek.

Joining forces with him is well-known architect Tay Kheng Soon, 68, who is designing a village where “children can plant organic vegetables, go on hikes, climb trees, go river rafting and milk cows”.

“My friends with young children are telling me their children are growing up absurd,” Mr Tay told The Straits Times.

“They are afraid of ants and insects, think that chickens come in plastic bags without feathers and spend their time playing computer games, watching television and shopping.”

At Kampung Temasek located at Sungai Tiram, less than a 30-minute drive from Johor Baru, families can join “get back to nature” programmes and stay in one of the 65 non-air-conditioned huts for a few days to weeks at a stretch.

There will also be three longhouses, which can sleep up to 100 children each.

The village, estimated to cost about \$5 million to develop, will be open to the public – who can pay to join its programmes – as well as to charities, which can use the place to run adventure camps for youth, for example.

The two men hope the initiative will also attract artists and farmers to live and work there, adding to the kampung atmosphere.

So why is Mr Sim, 52, offering his land which he



Mr Jack Sim (right) and Mr Tay Kheng Soon are joining forces in the kampung initiative. ST PHOTO: BRYAN VAN DER BEEK

bought for RM\$400,000 back in 1993, for next to nothing?

The father of four said: “The land is sitting empty and I thought, why don’t I offer it up for a good cause...Besides, my children are now in their teens and have no use for it until maybe in 20 years’ time when they can take over the land.”

The businessman turned full-time campaigner for clean toilets feels that Singapore’s urban, high density, fast-paced living will eventually take its toll on the younger generation.

Mr Sim, who grew up in a poor family in a kampung near Paya Lebar, said: “Life here can be dehumanising sometimes. We are so orientated towards economic development and often, we are not in touch with our feelings, other people and nature. If you are isolated from people and nature, you will find it hard to work with others.”

He added: “With Kampung Temasek, we hope to bring back the old feeling, the old Singapore we enjoyed so much. It’s not that we don’t like Singapore today, but we feel that kampungs are missing here...Since there are no more kampungs here, let’s create one.”

Kampung Temasek is expected to be completed in about a year’s time.

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