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Vietnam tide in Bidong

Ajitpal Singh

KUALA TERENGGANU, July 29:

On Sept 1, 200 Vietnamese will arrive here to thank a land which once gave them refuge.

Their gratitude for shelter and care three decades ago on Pulau Bidong will see the restoration of buildings and monuments on the island dubbed "Little Saigon".

The representatives of the 250,000 Vietnamese boat-people who once called the island home are scheduled to meet Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh on the project which will offer aid to the Bidong Heritage Fund.

It is learnt that each Vietnamese who lived on the island would contribute about US\$1 (RM3.75) to the fund.

In addition, successful Vietnamese businessmen would also help in financing the project.

State Chinese Historical Committee member Alcoh Wong Yahow said the Vietnamese boat people's committee (VBP) was expected to learn more about the project at the meeting.

"Although the State Government has identified the old buildings and monuments that would be restored, the VBP is still in the dark over this matter," he told the New Straits Times today.

"The committee also wants to know the budget and the State Government's contribution towards the project."

Wong said association members had been visiting the island for years and were upset about the sorry state of structures there.

"However, they are happy that the State Government has acknowledged Pulau Bidong's rich history," he added.

State Industrial Development and Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Mohamed Awang Tera had earlier said the project would start next year if there were funds.

Every year, Pulau Bidong is visited by some 5,000 Vietnamese who once lived on the island.



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