

Essay on a Report of a Fire

Bukit Kayu, Friday, 13th – Fire destroyed a large part of a squatters' colony near here in the early hours of the morning. An old man was killed in the fire while hundreds were made homeless. The fire was believed to have started from somewhere in the middle of the sprawling colony of more than a hundred illegal homes. The Fire Department is still investigating the cause of the fire. According to a department spokesman, an electrical short-circuit is suspected. However, arson is not ruled out. The fire was first discovered by a morning-shift factory worker who declined to be identified. He said he was preparing to go to work when he saw two houses on fire.

One was an empty house while the other was occupied by an old man. He said he gave the alarm and tried to enter the burning house to rescue the old man, but he could not get in because the flames were already too strong. So he returned to his family and quickly evacuated them to safety. The fire spread so quickly that by the time the Fire Department arrived at the scene all they could do was to spray water on the yet unburnt houses to check the spread of the fire. The predominantly wooden houses made excellent material for the fire. Also, the haphazard construction of the houses made it almost impossible for the firemen to reach the burning houses.

There were no fire hydrants near the houses anyway and the firemen had to make use of those outside the colony which were too far away to be effective. Anyhow the firemen did a commendable job of saving the rest of the houses. But hundreds are made homeless by the fire. At present they are taking shelter at the Balai raga nearby. The parliamentary representative for Bukit Kayu, Datuk S. Visvanathan visited the scene of the fire this morning. He spoke at length with some of the victims. He later donated \$1,000 towards the Fire Victims' Fund. He urged the public to contribute to the fund to help

the victims. He also promised that he would do all he could to find alternative homes for the victims. Meanwhile, the relatives of the deceased showed up at the mortuary to claim his remains. It is believed that the deceased was an old childless widower who lived on his own in the colony. At present personnel from the Fire Department are still sifting among the burnt-out buildings to retrieve whatever evidence they can find. Some victims are also busy trying to look for any recoverable things from their former homes.