

Shekkipmei Estate protest...

600 tell Govt: We will not pay May rents

MORE THAN 600 Shekkipmei Housing Estate tenants have decided not to pay their rent next month.

On March 28, 814 households in the converted blocks received a Housing Department notice of a rent increase.

The increases range

from \$8 to \$25 a month starting in May — an increase of seven cents per square foot.

Residents affected by the increase have decided not to pay their rent for May and have put up protest posters in the estate and called press conferences to state their views.

Chairman of the Shekkipmei Housing Estate Residents Committee, Mr Li Yue-nam, said the tenants hold little hope that the

Government would consider their difficulties and not increase the rents.

"But we still have to make our views known to the Government and the public," Mr Li said.

He said the Housing Department had workmen tear down the protest posters.

"But we'll put up new ones as soon as they remove those we've posted," Mr Li asserted.

He added the Government can expect further action if it continues with its high-rents policy, regardless of opposition.

"We're very angry that the Government had the heart to increase rent despite the deplorable conditions our converted flats are in," he said.

Mr Li said the flats were converted from the oldest of the resettlement blocks the Government built in the 1950s.

Besides being more spacious, the "new" converted flats are equipped with a toilet and a kitchen sink.

"And then there's the four bare walls with cracks in them and a leaking roof," Mr Li said.

He said residents have complained to the Housing Department about the leaking roofs and the cracked walls.

"They just added a layer of tar on the roof to stop the leaks and they promised to repair the cracked walls.

"So far they haven't done anything about the cracks in the walls and the layer of tar on the roof made the flats unbearably hot in the summer," Mr Li said.

He went on to say that the doors in the converted flats are flimsy and can be broken by kicking them.

And the toilet doors decomposed after being splashed with water and literally peeled apart, he claimed.

When residents complained to the Housing Department they were told to put zinc plates on the decomposing doors.

"But that is the duty of the landlord," Mr Li said.

"The Government can't go on bullying poor people living in housing estates," he continued.

"We're less educated and we allowed ourselves to be bullied before because we didn't know our rights.

"But it's not so now. This time we'll show the Government what we think peacefully, but who knows what might happen if the rents are increased again in two years' time," Mr Li added.