

10-year homes fall for the tube

Ngau Chi Wan squatters yesterday tore down buildings they have occupied for 10 years, as a demolition squad began clearance work for the Mass Transit System.

And an eight-year-old girl, Chu Suet-yin, worked alongside her parents with a saw as their structure came down.

Oblivious of the activity around her, Suet-yin concentrated on sawing through supporting wooden pillars.

"We can use the old material to build a new home in the Kowloon Bay licensed area," she said.

Earlier, a number of hawkers and shopowners, who say they have not been given any compensation or allocation, had warned the clearance could be marked by trouble, but the demolition was carried out without incident.

The 50 protestors held a meeting on Monday night and decided to stay in the area to protect their premises.

But when a large squad of police and demolition workers arrived, they changed their minds and began to pack their possessions.

About 200 police and demolition workers were at the site yesterday.

According to one fruit shop owner, Mr Lo Chan-lee, the food-stall owners and hawkers who were not given compensation would continue their business in the area.

Although they cannot operate from their former premises, they plan to become mobile hawkers or food stall operators, Mr Lo said.

The demolition started shortly after 9 am and was completed by about 5 pm. During the day, 130 demolition workers tore down 239 premises, including 79 shops, 27 factories or workshops and 131 domestic squatter huts.

An Urban Councillor, Mrs Elsie Elliott, visited the site twice to talk to squatters.

She told them she would help them as much as possible.

A Housing Department spokesman said of the 1,065 people from 239 families, factories, workshops and hawker stalls in the area, 223 families have been resettled to housing estates at Mei Tung, Sau Mau Ping and Lam Tin or licensed areas; 31 shops have

been granted a total of \$218,000 compensation; and 24 factories have been given public factory spaces and \$274,000 compensation.

Sixteen families, 48 shops or hawker stalls and three factories were considered ineligible for compensation or allocation, the spokesman said.

Although the squatters now have a chance to move into modern estates, many were sad to leave premises they lived in for more than 10 years.

"This was our world," said Mrs Ng Ying (60) who lived in a rent-free 100 sq ft room with four children. "It wasn't much, but it was home for us."

Mrs Wong Oi was crying when she talked about the demolition of her home.

"This is where I brought up my daughter - and my grandchildren," she said.

The demolition was to prepare land for building the Choi Hung Station for the Mass Transit System. Building will begin on January 12.

The clearance had already been postponed once to give the squatters time to move.