

AUGUST FIRE - KAMPONG AYER

Anna Wang

*'I once had a home
...on the Water Village'*

One poor soul groans.
Built of stilts
Reinforced with barnacles

The outward shabbiness
Belies an affluence;
Traditional and modern
Coexist harmoniously
In Brunei's Venice

What carelessness ignited
This horrendous inferno
In the lunar month of Hades?
Voluminous flames in tow
To the heavens

Lighting the Milky Way
Rendering the moon redundant,
Pitted into morass in the early morn
Many thousands
Plunged into the sea

The tongues of fire to escape
Sealing their fate,
Life-savings gone to perdition
No valid claims from insurance
Surfacing they look wan -

The milk of human kindness attends
To shore them up
With temporary abode,
So they can rise up
Fresh from the ashes, a Phoenix

*(The disaster coincided with the Month of the Hungry Ghosts in Chinese belief -
27.8.90)*

Anna Wang is a Singaporean poet who has visited Brunei several times and who describes herself as an "Artrageous person - in writing and painting".