

**Poser over 'written-off' loans for Bakun folk**  
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Sarawak PKR has raised a poser over the cancellation of the remaining RM41 million housing loans extended to 1,700 families of the Sungai Asap resettlement scheme in Uu Belaga in Kapit Division of Sarawak.

Its Sarawak chief, Baru Bian (left), said the Auditor-General's Report 2007 stated that the federal government had reimbursed RM534.05 million to the Sarawak state government which had advanced the expenditure for the payment of compensation and the preparation of infrastructure facilities at the scheme.

"And yet, the same report states that the total compensation not yet paid to the resettled folk as at the end of December 2007 amounted to RM46.28 million.

"There are Bakun resettled people who still have not been fully compensated although they moved out of the Bakun area more than 10 years ago," he said yesterday.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, while on a visit to the Sungai Asap resettlement scheme last week, had said the federal government had agreed in principle to cancel the housing loans to families affected by the construction of the RM7.3 billion dam.

Baru said if the government was really serious about genuine compensation, it should pay the people of Sungai Asap the housing compensation due to them from 12 years ago, with interest and bonus at the Amanah Saham Bumiputera (ASB) dividend rate.

He said a majority of people had their old housing valued (and probably under-valued) at RM35,000 or above.

"At RM35,000, at the ASB dividend rate plus bonus of 10% per year, total dividends, withdrawn annually, would have amounted to RM42,000.

"If the dividends had been re-invested, the compounded dividend alone would now be worth RM75,000, that is, much more than the 'loan' that the government now claims to be writing off."

He said if the government did not pay the people the housing compensation due to them with interest - at the dividend plus bonus rate of the ASB - all Najib's talk of writing-off the loan was merely playing tricks with numbers.

"If not, we of the PKR will take Najib's statement about writing-off the RM41 million loan to be just a same-old, same-old, tin-kosong BN public relations exercise," he said.

**Tenacity of Sungai Asap folk lauded**

Baru praised the people of Sungai Asap for their tenacity in refusing to pay the so-called housing loan in the resettlement scheme ever since they moved into the area.

"Indeed, PKR stands by the people who rightly refused to pay for their low-quality and

defective housing in the resettlement since the housing should have been provided free to them for giving way to the Bakun dam," he said.

He said it was quite obvious to all that the BN had now been forced to concede and cancel the so-called 'loans' after numerous attempts to force the people to pay, including attempts to prevent those whose homes had burnt down from occupying the replacement houses.

"This is clearly because of the rise of the Pakatan. The federal and state Barisan are afraid of Pakatan's growing influence in Sungai Asap and have had to give way to the people's refusal to pay or risk losing votes," Baru alleged.

He said had it not been for the opposition's growing strength, the federal and state governments would still be abusing the people of Sungai Asap who were forced to give up their ancestral lands for the non-essential Bakun dam over a decade ago.

With regard to the lack of agricultural land allocated to each family in Sungai Asap as pointed out by Najib, Baru said: "The allocation of three acres, or 1.25 hectares, per door/bilik was a decision made solely by Chief Minister Abdul Taib Mahmud.

"Let us not pretend to be shocked about this. If Najib and the federal government were serious about this issue, they should hold Taib to account for discriminating against poor native bumiputeras, especially since he has, at the same time, awarded hundreds of thousands of hectares to his family members and friends, and to a select few crony companies in Sarawak which are responsible for the current shocking state of the forest and environment here.

"While the 1,700 families were pushed into a resettlement of around 5,000 hectares, about half of which was hilly, infertile land, hundreds of thousands of hectares were being handed out to plantation companies," he said.

He said the people of Sungai Asap deserve better and more than what they are getting from the government.