

'End to Orang Asli woes if BN takes Kelantan'

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By Hazlan Zakaria

Rural and Regional Development Minister Mohd Shafie Apdal has given his pledge that the woes of the Orang Asli in Kelantan will be addressed immediately after the east coast state falls to BN rule.

"These include the land issues faced by Orang Asli in areas such as Meru and Kuala Krau, pertaining to land belonging to certain individuals," Shafie told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today.

NONEHe was referring to the demonstration by a group of Orang Asli against the Kelantan state government last week, protesting the takeover of their land for the state's Ladang Rakyat plantation scheme and other projects.

However, Shafie said, they would have to wait for the state to fall back to BN control as land issues are under the purview of the state.

Asked how fast the Orang Asli concerns would be addressed if the BN took over Kelantan, he said he could not give a firm answer, but stressed that it would be "immediate".

"It depends on when the general election is going to be held... and I don't know when that is.

"But once BN takes over, I cannot say how long after, but we have our timetable for these things," the minister said.

'Kesedar one of the ways to ensure win'

He also hinted that federal regional development schemes such as Kesedar would be one of the ways for the BN to ensure its win in the long-time PAS stronghold.

"I never realised that Kesedar covers more than two-thirds of Kelantan. If so, we should be able to get (the state)... if we plan well and all our resources can be utilised."

Shafie said the Kelantan people were starved for development, which the PAS-led government could not deliver.

"Thus the federal government must step in," added the Sabahan, who is the MP for Semporna.

The issue of Orang Asli rights and alleged encroachment into their native customary rights land has made the rounds in the ping-pong blame game between the ruling BN and opposition Pakatan Rakyat members to garner support for the coming general election.

Both sides are trading brickbats and blaming each other for marginalising the Orang Asli.

The BN is also under heavy fire for encroachments into Sabah and Sarawak native land by its cronies, while PAS-led Kelantan has been blamed for land grabs.

