

Umno: 35,000 face eviction in Penang

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By Susan Loone

Penang Umno liason chief Zainal Abidin Osman has claimed that residents of 50 villages squatting on private or state land are to be evicted, but that the state government does not have the requisite policy to offer them affordable alternative housing.

Datuk Zainal Abidin Osman, penang umno chiefIn an interview, Zainal (left) said the looming crisis will affect about 7,000 families, or about 35,000 individuals, whose cases are pending in court.

During the BN-led administration of Penang, he said, communities that were evicted were given affordable homes as the coalition has agencies like Perda to deal with such matters.

"The state must have a specific plan and strong political will to resolve this problem. Without a proper blueprint, matters are bound to get worse for the affected Penangites," said the former Nibong Tebal MP.

"Over 55 years, we settled half of the problem. I am sure, if we do research, we will find that there were more such cases in the past, but the numbers have reduced over the years. If BN regains Penang, we can resolve the problem in two or three years and with a special budget.

"We should have done more, I agree, or should have done it faster, but at that point in time, we did not think that we could lose (the state election). So, we did it phase by phase. But this was disrupted by the rakyat's decision to give (Pakatan Rakyat) the mandate to rule (in 2008)."

Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng (right) may beg to differ with Zainal's opinion, having recently handed over RM500 million to the state-run Penang Development Corporation to build affordable homes.

The money, he said, was derived from profits from the sale of the Bayan Mutiara land.

The first housing project in Batu Kawan, launched early this year, comprises 12,000 units on 80 hectares and will be completed in the next 10 years.

'BN will keep Putrajaya'

Zainal further said it is regrettable that Lim has not brought about substantial changes to Penang.

He expressed the hope that successful development projects, such as those in the Klang Valley and the Iskandar business area in Johor, can be duplicated in Penang as investments in the state will soon reach tipping point.

azlanPenang offers potential for higher investment, he said, as land in the Seberang Perai area can still be purchased at RM10 per sq ft, compared to at least RM200 psf on the island.

He urged Penangites to help the BN regain leadership of the state, noting that it is a disadvantage to have opposing political parties in the federal and state governments.

"I worry that there will be a mismatch after the election ... and Penangites will suffer," he said.

Zainal said he is confident that the BN will retain Putrajaya, either with a two-thirds or a simple majority after the 13th or even 14th general election.

If the BN fails to recapture Penang in spite of all its "hard work", many development plans will be disrupted, he cautioned.

"The effect will be felt, not in the short term, but over the long term. A RM22 billion commitment to implement various projects is pending. If this money does not come to the state, what (then)?"

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