

## **DAP: Sarawak gov't giving leased land to cronies**

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The Sarawak government has reserved some 7,000 acres of land within a three-kilometre radius of Betong town for its cronies by freezing all applications to renew leases of land from 2010, Sarawak DAP chief Chong Chieng Jen said today.

"My suspicion is that those lands will go to state government cronies in order to enrich their pockets, since there is no concrete plan to develop Betong town," Chong said when commenting on a letter issued by the Land and Survey Department in Betong.

DAP had written a letter to the department asking why applications for the renewal of leases for lands within a 3km radius of Betong have been frozen after they expired.

The department's letter confirms that all applications for land lease renewal for parcels within the 3km radius of Betong would not be considered for the time being, in order to enable the government to prepare and implement a structure plan for the town.

"From the letter, it is obvious that the government has no concrete plan to develop the town, so my suspicion is that the lands are being reserved for its cronies," said Chong, who is Kota Sentosa assemblyperson and the MP for Bandar Kuching.

The value of the land parcels involved is estimated to be between RM400 million and RM600 million.

Some of the local people have described the lands as the 'Betong goldmine'.

'Already awarded to prominent persons'

However, speculation among the people in Betong is that some parcels have already been awarded to a number of 'prominent' persons.

Chong said: "The blanket freeze on all land leases is the most draconian land policy of the state that I have ever known in the 15 years that I have been a representative of the people.

"We will follow up this issue as no government has the right to deprive land and property owners of their land rights.

"The freeze is wholesale robbery, since there is no time-frame to freeze the lands, and it can be 50 years or even 100 years," he said, pointing out that the landowners have the right to challenge the government by way of political pressure.

Since 2010, the landowners, comprising largely Chinese Malaysians and Ibans, have been trying to renew their land leases as they were about to expire.

Native customary rights (NCR) lands belonging to nine Iban longhouse dwellers are also affected by the blanket rejection of the lease renewals.

The Ibans, who are strong supporters of Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister Alfred Jabu Numpang, have turned to him for assistance, since their longhouses are within the state constituency of Layar that he represents.

However, there has been no response from Alfred Jabu till now, so the people have also been complaining to DAP that some political figures are involved in the whole affair.

The landowners had told him that some of their names have vanished, replaced by other names allegedly linked to these political figures.

DAP Betong branch chairperson Stephen Dass said he was collecting evidence on this abuse of power by the state.

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