

'Squatters are pawns in MCA's political game'
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State executive councillor Phee Boon Poh said that the soon-to-be-evicted residents of Kampung Bagan Ajam have become "victims in a political game".

Despite this, Phee said the state government will assist the residents, describing them as "squatters", even though they have decided to turn to MCA to help them resolve their predicament.

Phee (right) denied that the Penang government or his office has not been defending the residents' rights, saying he accepted their personal opinion that they were not satisfied with him and Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng for their response in the matter.

"We accept this statement as this is their right of opinion. They must be aware that this is a private and not public development unless they have been misled," Phee said when met at his office in Komtar.

"However, the continuation of their statement that we have an interest in the development is defamatory, very misleading and damaging and we reserve our rights in seeking legal advice and redress," Phee added.

Phee was referring to an email he received today from the residents' spokesperson Wong Sek Li, saying that the negotiations with the developer has failed and that the residents would be seeking help from MCA.

Wong and about 70 other residents staged a peaceful protest in their residential area in Kampung Bagan Ajam this morning, demanding that the developer, Tah Wah Group, compensate them with a replacement unit.

The residents are not happy with the financial compensation of between RM7,000 to RM25,000 that the developer was offering, Wong, 40, an accounts clerk, added, alleging that the state government had an interest in the development.

"As a human, of course I am upset because they have decided this (to seek MCA's help) despite our sincere assistance but anger is not the way to deal with this issue so I am not angry," Phee said.

MCA's Bagan Ajam bureau chief Sum Yoo Keong also attended the rally with residents, asking Guan Eng to prevent the residents from being evicted as they lived in his parliamentary constituency, Bagan.

Phee said MCA's response must be based on experience, where in the past, private developers used the BN state government to clear the land and then use it for development.

Now that MCA are in the opposition, they think the state is using a private developer to chase the squatters, and later build the undersea tunnel in the area, Phee added.

'Developer's lawyer was MCA candidate'

Phee also noted that the developer's lawyer, Song Choy Leng, was MCA's candidate who contested the Bagan seat against Guan Eng in 2008 and lost.

"Where is the logic? Whose interests are being protected? Stacked in between are the innocent squatters who were made used in a political game," Phee quipped.

Phee then showed evidence that his office had been involved in assisting the residents since Nov 25 last year up to yesterday, where the residents claimed that the developer had tried to cut electricity and water supply to the area, forcing them to move out.

Showing record of email conversations with the developer and residents, Phee said his special officer contacted the developer on Dec 12 last year, and on Dec 23, the latter agreed to a meeting with the residents.

In April, the record showed that several meetings between the developer and residents took place in Komtar.

He said negotiations are still ongoing between the developer and the "squatters", adding that they were meeting in batches, resolving individuals cases, and not as a group.

On May 23, Tah Wah spokesperson Chew Chee Meng wrote to Phee stating that the company had offered "above the average" financial assistance in Bagan based on the sizes, materials and depreciation factor of each premises.

Chew also noted that all affected residents have been staying on the said land for few decades or more than 30 years.

"Many of the premises are illegal without legal status. Some premises being occupied by extended families at different portions and they claim that each family is entitled to receive compensation.

"Many of the premises being rented out to foreigners, legal and illegal, and for business purposes. Squatters, tenants have been enjoying the financial benefit all these years."

Chew said the company had obtained court judgments against all residents where they are ordered to deliver vacant possession of the land and to pay legal costs.

Chew added that the residents had failed to respond positively after being served the

judgments, but then acknowledged that the state had intervened on the court order and for now, accepted the latter's appeal for time and negotiation.

'47 had accepted settlement'

Chew clarified that initially there were 120 premises, whereby 47 had accepted the settlement and their premises had been fully demolished.

"Therefore it is unfair and unjust for the remaining 73 to allege that the compensation sums offered are too low," Chew said.

Chew said the company had again met with residents on April 24 and 25 upon Phee's request and agreed to increase compensation, and withhold further enforcement proceedings until the end of August "except for the residents of a few premises which we feel are not intending to settle amicably with us".

Chew said Wong, though alleged to be representing the residents, is not in the developer's records as a house owner and has no locus standi to voice out in the matter.

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