

State ignoring safety of Miri folk, charges DAP
MalaysiaKini.com
Jun 28, 2014

DAP Piasau state assembly person Alan Ling has accused Infrastructure Development and Communications Minister Michael Manyin of not taking seriously the safety of hundreds of residents living under the threat of landslides, especially those at the foot and atop Canada Hill in Miri.

The accusation is born out a number of landslides and soil erosions during heavy rains early this year that hit Canada Hill, threatening the safety of the residents of Kampung Haji Wahid and Kampung Lereng Bukit.

Five years ago a landslide at the same area killed two petrol station workers, two weeks later another one at the Canada Hill destroyed eight houses in nearby Kampung Lereng where 108 people had to be evacuated and moved to the Miri Red Crescent building.

The DAP rep raised the issue during the May sitting of state assembly, asking the minister what measures the government had taken to address soil erosion at Canada Hill, to disclose survey conducted (if any) and the preventive measures currently in place.

Last week Ling received a brief written reply from the minister who stated that the big move to resettle people from Canada Hill in 2004 was part of the government's initiative to eradicate urban squatters in a mission to achieve zero squatters.

The minister said then squatters were resettled at a better and safer location in properly laid out residential lots and provided with amenities such as proper access roads and public utilities.

In that reply, the minister also said that the resettlement of the squatters was also part of the overall Miri city extension plan.

Unsatisfactory reply get rep's goat

Ling was steaming when he received the reply, saying that the minister was not only dodging the questions, but was misleading the state assembly ignoring the safety of his constituency's residents.

"Looking at the answers, they are totally out of sense, illogical and mockery of its kind," he said, pointing out that the minister would not have committed such a blunder had he taken his ministerial duties seriously by checking and reading the answers provided by his officers before sending it to elected representatives.

"It is common and acceptable practice for the officer in charge of the relevant fields to prepare the answers but it is also compulsory for the minister to check and approve the answers before the reply is sent out.

"If the minister was occupied at the material time, we have plenty of assistant ministers to help, but why did such a blunder happen?

"The minister's reply was not only deviating from the questions asked, but also misleading the state assembly.

He expressed his intention to submit a motion at the November assembly sitting to ask for a RM100 cut in the minister's salary.

In the meantime, the minister must explain the matter to the public which is crucial for the safety of the affected residents of Canada Hill, he said.

Expressing regret that such an important issue was answered in such a way, Ling said that the residents in Kampung Haji Wahid and Kampung Lereng Bukit demand that the minister look into this issue seriously before another tragedy happens.

The ministry's reply is understandable knowing that the Canada Hill has been a very 'sensitive' issue since 2004, according to a political observer.

Cronyism raises ugly head

The minister admitted that the squatters were ordered to move out to pave the way for the overall Miri city extension plan, but the 'sensitive' issue was that the contracts for such works had been given to a company allegedly linked to the Sarawak United People's Party.

Even though the opposition DAP and PKR have been highlighting the issue and accused SUPP of having some interest in the development of Canada Hill, the state then under Abdul Taib Mahmud had tried to remain silent, claimed the observer.

He said that in the 2011 state polls, the issue turned into a 'hot potato' resulting in the fall of SUPP President and Deputy Chief Minister George Chan from his Piasau seat taken over by Alan Ling of the DAP and SUPP candidate Andy Chia lost his Pujut seat to the then DAP candidate Fong Pau Teck.

SUPP also almost lost the Senadin constituency when its candidate Lee Kim Shin scrapped through with a mere 58-vote majority.

Again the opposition raised the issue in the 2013 parliamentary election causing SUPP candidate Sebastian Ting to lose the Miri seat to PKR's Michael Teo.

"It is understandable why Manyin tried to avoid answering the questions asked by YB Ling," added the observer.

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