

Orang Asli in the dark over land policy amendments

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The Orang Asli community fears it will lose large chunks of ancestral lands after being denied access to the final draft of proposed amendments to Aboriginal Peoples Act (Act 134).

The amendments to the Act are expected to be tabled during the current sitting of the Dewan Rakyat.

"Copies of the final draft to proposed changes to the law should rightfully be given to all Orang Asli groups and organisations to enable them to study it with their lawyers," said Bob Manolan, a representative of the Orang Asli Graduates Association (PSOA).

"After studying the draft, we can decide if it will benefit the government or the Orang Asli collectively. If the Orang Asli are safe in terms of land ownership, this will indirectly make the government happy," he told Malaysiakini.

NONEBob (right) gave an example of a JHEOA road show in Kuantan on March 6 this year, attended by about 80 community leaders in the state.

"The road show was just a one-way traffic, with the Orang Asli Affairs Department (JHEOA) stressing the advantages of the proposed amendments," he said.

The main concern of the Orang Asli community, he said, was that they would lose a lot of their ancestral land through the implementation of the proposed amendments.

"If this land policy is carried out, we will lose almost 80 percent of the land we now own. The government wants to give only two to six acres of land per household.

"I do not know if the proposed two to six acres of land is the land we are currently staying on, or it is located somewhere else."

orang asli protest in putrajaya 170310Bob explained that following the National Orang Asli Convention in Cheras on March 6, Rural and Regional Development Minister, Shafie Apdal announced that leaders of PSOA would attend a meeting to give input and opinions on behalf of the Orang Asli community.

This proposed meeting was sparked by the protest of nearly 2,000 Orang Asli in Putrajaya in March.

Representatives from the Orang Asli Organisation of Peninsular Malaysia (POASM), the Orang Asli Village Networks of Peninsular Malaysia (JKOASM) and other Orang Asli scholars are also expected to attend the meeting.

"I have checked with the president of POASM, and he said that he has yet to receive any information of such a meeting," Bob said.

POASM representative Yusri Ahon said the proposed amendments to the Act did not take into account Tanah Adat (land for farming) and Tanah Rayau (land for hunting and gathering).

He said the land currently inhabited by the Orang Asli should remain theirs because not only was it used for farming but also as a burial ground.

'JHEOA staff unfit to handle Orang Asli'

In a related matter, Bob stressed that the staff of JHEOA were unfriendly and ineffective in handling Orang Asli issues.

He also suggested that the majority of JHEOA and Orang Asli hospitals be staffed by indigenous people, which will enable these institutions to serve the community effectively.

"In our national convention in Cheras recently, we suggested to the government that we want at least 70 percent of staff in JHEOA and Orang Asli hospitals to be of our ethnic descent," he said.

The amendments to the Act are expected to be debated and passed during the current parliamentary sitting.

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