

NCR land surveys: S'wak minister gets ticking off
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PKR Sarawak chief Baru Bian yesterday slammed state Assistant Minister of Planning and Resource Management Mohd Naroden Majais, for saying that natives can get their land surveyed only if they go through BN elected representatives.

"That is politicking. It is nonsense and very irresponsible for him to say that. If (the government) is really sincere about helping the natives this would not be an issue," he said when contacted.

Mohd Naroden had on Tuesday said that the government cannot act if requests for land surveys, for the purpose of native customary rights (NCR) claims, are made via opposition elected representatives

Baru Bian Sarawak PKR-leader at Bruno Manser commemoration Baru, (left) who has spent decades defending native customary rights land as a lawyer, said that the minister's statement shows how little he knows of the mechanics of NCR land.

"It is the government's duty to conduct land surveys under section 18 of the Sarawak Land Code, he said.

He added that if there is sufficient evidence of ownership, they should produce land titles, but they have been trotting out excuses after excuses.

The Sarawak government had previously claimed that the Land and Survey Department cannot undertake the survey work for lack of funds.

To address this, Prime Minister Najib Razak announced that RM20 million of the federal budget will be allocated for this purpose.

Shortchanging the natives

The announcement, however, failed to impress Baru whose experience in dealing with NCR issues suggest that it is "just rhetoric".

"I have the feeling that they don't want to conduct the surveys because they are afraid that the whole of Sarawak belongs to the natives," he said.

Even if surveys are conducted, said the Orang Ulu lawyer, it is likely to shortchange the natives.

NONE Surveys could only take into account the land which the longhouses sit on, he said, , several cases in Sibu are testimony to this.

There is s also the case of the natives made to move to make way for the Bakun hydroelectric dam.

"That land is not disputed. What is disputed is the land five to 10 kilometres from the longhouses, the farmland which the natives survive on but likely to have been given away to someone else," he said.

At present, Sarawak natives are embroiled in multiple legal disputes over what they claim to be their NCR land.

This has, however, been challenged by private companies with provisional leases from the state government.

In some cases, natives have been assaulted or charged with trespass when they try to defend their land.

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