

Farmers ask Suhakam for help over land ownership
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Forty-two farmers in Tanjung Tualang, Perak, are in a bind after the land they have been working on - some since the 1980s - is said to belong to a state agency.

After applying for ownership of the land numerous times, they were shocked to discover this.

Not knowing where to go, they today sought help from the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam).

What makes their plight worse is that the current BN and the former Pakatan Rakyat state government denied that they made the decision to award the land to the state agency.

BN had blamed the previous Pakatan Rakyat led government, but ousted Menteri Besar Mohd Nizar Jamaluddin, when the farmers met him in February, demanded BN show proof.

The farmers tried to appeal to the land authorities following unscrupulous people claiming to be the proper land owners, encroaching and destroying four plots operated by the farmers.

They had approached Perak Menteri Besar Zambry Abdul Kadir, but there were no answers.

Parti Sosialis Malaysia deputy president M Sarasvathy said after their hard work and toil on the land which comprised an abandoned tin mining pond, and jungle, they now stood to lose everything.

They have been planting bananas and oil palm, rearing cows and ducks, and breeding freshwater fish since the 1980s.

"Sometime in 2009, they were told by the Lands and Mines Department that it had been allocated to a state agency for the purpose of aquaculture and planting."

Also present was PSM president and Kota Damansara assemblyperson Dr Nasir Hashim, who also wanted the authorities to resolve the situation.

Living in fear

One of affected farmers, Hoo Sing Kok, 41 said they do not know what to do as the BN government and the previous Pakatan government had left them in the lurch.

"They blame each other while our problems are not resolved. Our letters to get the land were not answered. The Perak Lands and Mines Department finally replied last October saying it had been awarded to a state agency. We are still farming but fear being forced out," he said.

Hoo (*left*) said there were various government departments including Agriculture, Fisheries and the Drainage and Irrigation Department, which had visited their land over the years but they had never indicated there were any problems.

Nasir said following the last letter from the Perak Land and Mines Department in October last year, there were no further replies although they had demanded explanations. "When a letter is sent it should be replied within a stipulated time frame," he remarked.

Suhakam to visit farmers soon

Suhakam commissioner Mohd Sha'ani Abdullah, who accepted a memorandum from the farmers, said the commission will write to the state government and the state Lands and Mines Department for an explanation.

"The problem is not new as even those possessing land grants also face the same problems from the authorities. This is certainly going against human rights as they had developed the idle land, spent their money and now somebody else takes over.

"Suhakam hopes to visit the farmers as soon as possible to get to know their situation," he said.

Mohd Sha'ani admitted Suhakam's role is limited as it can only provide advice to the state government or departments concerned, but it does not have enforcement powers.

He said that recommendations can only be made, but gave an assurance that Suhakam will look into the matter.

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