

Anwar: Dayaks lead lives of quiet desperation
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PKR advisor Anwar Ibrahim described the arrests of Iban landowners for alleged arson in the interior of Sarawak as "the latest chapter in the continuing saga of Dayak desperation" over native customary rights (NCR) land whose ownership is imperiled by logging and plantation agriculture companies.

The arrests of land rights activist Jacob Emang, Ziglar anak Kasau, Edward Ungga and Gerah ak Gugat in the Sri Aman division on April 17 followed police reports by a logging company that their mobile camps in Silantek had been torched. The four have been remanded until April 23.

Anwar described Dayaks in the interior of Sarawak as "living lives of quiet desperation that now and then flares up in action that invites police attention, not to mention the notice of the rest of Malaysians who don't quite know what it is to be under the tyranny of geography."

"Hence we in Semenanjung (peninsula) have little empathy for the plight of the Dayaks in the Sarawak interior," said the former deputy premier in remarks to malaysiakini on the arrests.

Anwar said the amendments to the land code in Sarawak in 2000 and 2001 had stoked fear among Dayak owners of NCR land that they were going to lose their inheritance to logging and plantation agriculture companies.

Land the 'last bastion'

He said state government assurances that NCR land was not being threatened and that putting such land to economic use via logging and plantation agriculture did little to assuage Dayak fears of disinheritance.

He described Dayak ties to NCR land as "mystic" and thus impervious to the market savvy calculations of planners for whom rising commodity prices made the sight of idle or poorly cultivated land a travesty of economics.

He said sources had told him that the four who were arrested owned NCR land in Abok in Sri Aman and that the logging company with a permit to extract timber had encroached on durian planted land belonging to the arrested NCR owners. The encroachment was by way of a path carved by the company enroute to the timber concession.

Anwar said the Dayaks' meagre educational opportunities, low skilled labour, and fragmented political leadership had conduced to poverty and made them regard their NCR land as the "last bastion" of their legitimacy as a people.

"They are the poorest community in Malaysia today and so the land issue has become an emotive one for them," he said.

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/66202>