

**Orang Asli landmine for BN in Galas**  
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Long touted to be BN safe deposits, Orang Asli communities are de facto strongholds of the ruling coalition, but if rumblings in the native grassroots are true, they may prove to be the landmine that may hamper if not stop a BN victory jig in Galas.

While mostly thought to be simple, uncomplicated people, easily swayed by the federal hand that feeds them, the Orang Asli, especially amongst the new generation, have aspirations beyond subsisting on federal aid.

NONE "We are hurt whenever the Orang Asli are referred to as hardcore poor. Whenever they give aid they always say that we are hardcore poor.

"We are not poor, if we are poor we would not be able to come here," complained Mustapa Alwie (left), 41, an ex-serviceman from the Orang Asli settlement of Balar, who also claimed to be its Umno branch secretary.

He lamented that the promises of aid that the federal government does keep are mostly just sugarcoated candies rather than anything concrete.

Fellow Balar resident Seman Aweng, 50, gave as an example a bridge near Balar which they requested.

NONE "They built a small bridge, which is not even big enough for a motorcycle to safely pass through," he said.

Seman (right) recounted that their relationship with the federal government aid is much like the halfway house built at the beginning of the trail that leads into the Orang Asli settlement in the interior.

"They called it house 46 or Rumah Sandang. A man called Sandang lived there and maintained it. He is a close confidant to Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah. That is where we stay when we are in town. Now he has passed away and no one really maintains it."

While a person from the land office is assigned to look after the house, it is to no avail as the once sturdy and well-maintained lodging is in a deplorable state, with the roof leaking and floor decaying.

"We have voted in five general elections, but with almost nothing to show for supporting BN," chimed in Mustapa.

'Tanah rayau' shrinking

Jamali Along, 24 from the settlement of Pasik, said that despite the land taken from them and logging which has continued since the 60s and 70s, there is no benefit to the Orang Asli per se.

"If we asked why there are no projects on our land for us, they say it is too far and would cost too much. But when our land is taken they would develop it and give it to someone

else, we get nothing.

NONE "All we see are the tyre tracks and dust of the logging vehicles," said Jamali (left).

Their main concern for now, said Mustapa, is for their customary land or tanah rayau which the Orang Asli depend upon for subsistence, that continues to shrink because of logging and development.

"We want to be free, what is important is our tanah rayau. This is our way of life. We want to be able to walk for days looking for resources in the forest. If it is six acres, we can walk it in only one afternoon," he lamented.

He fears that the federal government's plan to only give six acres to each family is not enough to sustain them in the long term.

"I have eight children, sooner or later they too are going to have children of their own, how is the family going to survive then?"

"If it were up to me, I'd sooner burn the six-acre land title, it is better if our customary land is gazetted and kept safe," he said.

Another controversy to have incensed the Orang Asli, according to the trio interviewed by Malaysiakini in Gua Musang town, is the huge swathe of land acquired, apparently by royal mandate.

"The land taken is from Belatim to Hau, it is in the tens of thousands of acres. Taken and made to be royal land by royalty. We don't know what they plan to do with our land, but we are not compensated for it."

However, they all agreed that the new sultan is unlike the royals exploiting their land and is working to restore their rights.

"The new sultan is okay, he doesn't like it that the Orang Asli rights are infringed upon. It is his mother and younger brother that took away and sold our lands," said Mustapa.

NONETheir claims seem to prove rumours recently floating around of certain royals appropriating native land for development projects. This is something which the newly-installed Sultan Muhammad V (left) is allegedly working to correct, including taking away state titles from those who were involved and reprimanding government officials who cooperated with the scheme.

The fallout of this may create Orang Asli empathy for the PAS-led government which is close to and instrumental in the installation of the new king.

It might also generate animosity against the Gua Musang MP, Tengku Razaleigh, who has professed to be looking after their interest since his Semangat 46 days, yet under whose stewardship such things occur.

PAS' guerrilla inroads

However, Mustapa admitted that the BN is strong in the Orang Asli settlements, with an election machinery numbering nearly 200 keeping a tight lid over the villages and a constant stream of BN dignitaries visiting and bearing gifts.

"We asked for and got drum sets for three bands, we are also asking for 10 cars, chainsaws and mowers," added Seman.

This is in contrast to the only two visits from PAS and only four election staffers making the rounds of the Orang Asli villages.

While Mustapa did not say that the sentiments of the Orang Asli are with PAS, he said that negotiations are under way to see if the state government's promise to gazette their tanah rayau is more believable than the often empty promises of the federal government.

"That is what is being discussed, we will see what happens," said the ex-soldier.

His revelation does seem to prove what is claimed by PAS campaign advisor and Kota Bharu assemblyperson Wan Abdul Rahim Wan Rahman, who said that the party is currently working behind the scenes in approaching the Orang Asli as opposed to the BN's overt methods.

The Orang Asli communities have been tipped by some experts to be the real kingmakers of the by-election in the Kelantanese state assembly seat, something which may be true if these sentiments are indicative of the Orang Asli voters.

pas muktamar 130610 nik abdul aziz 4As Jamali puts it, "The thing is, anyone who can help restore our rights and land, we will support."

With the PAS spiritual advisor Nik Aziz Nik Mat (right) and the party's candidate Dr Zulkefli Mohamad both scheduled to visit the Orang Asli in the interior today, it may indeed be that they have reached an understanding or at least a compromise with some of the native grassroots and are going to seal the deal.

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