

Komtar traders leader dares DAP rep to a fist fight
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The Komtar Traders Association has challenged the Penang government to a 'fight in the ring' as their relationship seemingly heads towards a complete collapse.

Both parties are at loggerheads, firstly over the recent Ramadan Bazaar, and currently over the state's plan to renovate the third floor of Komtar's concourse area, where the traders have set up stalls.

The state has put its foot down and is not likely to shelve its plans despite ongoing protests by the traders who have complained that the work would hurt their businesses as they have been told to ship out of the area.

NONEBut both parties seem only to express their opposing views through the media, and attempts by the Penang Development Corporation (PDC), which runs Komtar, to organise a meeting between the two parties, have failed.

Komtar Traders Association vice-president Mohamad Ghani Abdul Jiman (right) lamented that since the state refused to compromise with the traders, it was time to bring the struggle to the ring.

He has targeted Komtar assemblyperson Ng Wei Aik as he oversees the building restoration project and is responsible for ensuring that renovation plans go ahead without a hitch.

"Ng had said in the media that he is not bothered about Umno, so who is Ghani?" he had said, pointing at himself.

"Since he had said that, let's make a ring and we will fight; don't challenge the people," Mohamad Ghani warned.

Sweet nothings

He added that he was totally disappointed with the state as its representatives made many promises and uttered sweet nothings during their election campaign.

"But what happens after that? This time we will take a broom and chase them away when they come during election," he threatened.

Mohamad Ghani said the traders will refused to budge even if the state's enforcement team attempted were to evict them as they have decided to oppose them come what may.

"All we are asking is to give us time until after Chinese New Year (to move out) but they have refused to compromise with us," he added.

Mohamad Ghani and several traders had joined the noisy protest in front of the Penang state legislature assembly on Tuesday.

He had demanded to see Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, saying he had failed to meet the latter at his office in Komtar despite several attempts.

Mohamad Ghani failed again in yesterday's attempt.

Four months given

When asked to respond to the issue, Ng, political secretary to Lim, said the state had given the traders four months to vacate their stalls to make way for renovation work.

The project, was earmarked for July, and is thus behind time, and bound to cost the state some financial losses.

NONE "We need to think of the big picture, we need to think in the long term, and not view this issue narrowly, or consider it from one point only," said Ng (right).

"If this project is shelved, we will lose a lot of money as the tender has been awarded to the contractor," he added.

Ng said that the latest records show that 10 traders need to move out immediately as they have only paid rental for their stalls up to September, while another 18 have settled theirs up to November.

He added that the state has offered Komtar's fourth floor to the traders as an alternative trading space but they have refused, citing non-accessibility of the area to customers.

Ng also claimed that the state and PDC have jointly called for four meetings but each time, the traders were prevented from attending them by Mohamad Ghani.

Toilet used

"Who does Ghani represent? He may be scared to attend the meetings because he has done wrong," said Ng.

"We have found out that he has wrongfully used a toilet in Komtar as a store to keep his stuff; we have emptied the area as that store is illegal," he added.

Ng said the state has launched a new policy whereby those traders who do not cooperate with the state by clearing their stalls, the concourse will be closed to them for trading.

Ng also accused Mohamad Ghani of owing the state RM40,000 for rental collected for stalls at the Ramadan Bazaar.

"He has yet to hand over the money; we will take court action against him soon," said Ng, adding that he is currently trying to set up a meeting between Mohamad Ghani and Lim, as requested.