

MB : 'zero squatters' policy to continue
Malaysiakini.com
Mar 26, 2008
Fauwaz Abdul Aziz

Selangor Menteri Besar Abdul Khalid Ibrahim said yesterday that his government will stay the course embarked by his predecessor Dr Mohd Khir Toyo to eradicate all 'squatter' settlements in the state. MCPX

Mohd Khir's 'zero squatters' policy - and the demolition of sometimes decades-old settlements that accompanied it - had caused outrage among many sectors of the civil society and political activists.

Therefore, it must come as a surprise to these quarters that the decision to continue with the stand comes from Khalid, whose party PKR was at the forefront of efforts to uphold the rights of, among others, the Kampung Berembang settlement off Jalan Ampang.

khalid ibrahim interview 250308 03Khalid, however, said in addition to the housing claims by the urban settlers, the question of who the land belongs to as well as the interests of the landowner must be addressed as well.

"You can't allow people to become squatters in a state. There's the balance that we have to abide by," he told Malaysiakini in an exclusive interview at his office in Shah Alam yesterday.

"We want to accommodate the wishes of the squatters as much as we have to take into account the costs (incurred by) the developer," he added.

Can't please everyone

Acknowledging that there will be opposition to this position from many quarters, Khalid assured that the interests and rights of everyone concerned will be taken into consideration.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to please everyone of those with a stake in the matter, he said.

"We will continue to hear these grievances... I do not foresee that we will have a plain sailing exercise here.

"But we have to do what we have to do. Just like the illegal factories issue, this is also going to be a big issue, but we are not afraid to face it. We have to face it," he said.

Khalid said the state government will seek to go about the 'zero squatters' policy as humanely as possible and engage in dialogue with the communities in question in order to avoid a repeat of last year's fracas in Taman Rimba Jaya, Shah Alam.

rimba jaya kampung police 021107Many had criticised the manner in which the authorities carried out the eviction exercise in Rimba Jaya, which saw some municipal council personnel throwing stones towards the temples and other buildings targeted for demolition.

"We hope that it will not be repeated," stressed the new menteri besar.

"Just like my selection of 10 (state) excos will not please the remaining 25 excos, inevitably, I have to make a decision, and the decision will take into account the needs of the people, but it doesn't mean you have to please all the people," he added.

Foreign workers tax

Khalid also said the state government will seek to realise a system where companies that hire foreign workers will be 'taxed' RM9 per worker per month.

If this can be collected for all of the estimated 1.5 million foreign workers in Selangor, it can serve as a source of funding for skills training programmes for the state's youth. This, in turn, can contribute towards decreasing the dependence on foreign labour, said Khalid.

"I don't think the employers will grumble too much, because they are investing in the future of the state. Due to the decreased dependence on foreign labour, there will be less crimes, less social problems, less dependency on facilities and medical and so on.

"That is the tradeoff between the two. If I can do that, then I can move Selangor into the future," he said.

khalid ibrahim interview 250308 02On the issue of bungalows built several years ago by the state government to serve as the state excos' official residences, Khalid said the "extreme suggestion" that they be sold off was widely discussed.

However, he said an alternative idea is to rent out the bungalows to CEOs and other such figures so as to be a source of continuous revenue for the state.

"I think we shouldn't be in a rush to sell state assets, because property values do rise over a period of time if you believe that the Selangor economy will grow.

"Possibly, we can rent out the bungalows and earn over many years. Later, we can redesign the entire place and make it into a gated community so that the CEOs of major corporations residing in Selangor would be able to stay in this place.

"Of course, we have to charge them rental that reflects the quality of that real estate," he said.

Asset declaration

Khalid also revealed that several state excos had requested that they not be made to declare their assets publicly.

selangor state exco ceremony 240308 10He said this when asked if the Selangor government would go the way of the government in Penang, which had directed its excos and municipal council heads to declare their assets.

"We'll do it also ... but the timing of its implementation will take time.

"I'll have to ask my excos first. Some do not want to make their declarations public for 'family' reasons.

"If they feel they want to make it public, then we'll make it public. But there are reasons for this, because they say they do not want to show their shareholdings to the public," he added.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news//80406>