

**Samy Vellu leads Batu Caves protest to pressure Pakatan
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By Md Izwan**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 26 — Former MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu spearheaded today a demonstration at the Batu Caves Hindu temple, objecting to the construction of a 29-storey condominium project, in what is seen as a bid to pressure the Selangor Pakatan Rakyat (PR) administration ahead of the 13th general election.

The former works minister accused the Selayang Municipal Council (MPS) of having approved the construction project without a proper study. He said legal action could be taken against the council.

"This project is not planned properly and without referring to any professional party," Samy Vellu told a 300-strong crowd of Hindus and non-governmental activists who had turned up at the famous temple complex this morning to protest the condominium construction, saying the work was an environmental risk and would jeopardise the temple grounds.

"And the developer and MPS did not meet the temple committee to discuss and give notice about the project they planned," said the country's special envoy to India and South Asia.

The Sri Maha Mariamman Devasathanam temple committee chairman, Datuk R. Nadarajah, who was among the frontliners in today's "Save Batu Caves" rally, had criticised the state government for failing its duty to act responsibly and passing the buck over the approval of the condominium project to MPS.

The PR state government however has refuted it was responsible for approving the project, saying it was the previous Barisan Nasional (BN) administration led by Datuk Seri Dr Mohamad Khir Toyo that had in 2007 awarded the approval to developer Dolomite Properties Sdn Bhd.

The Minerals and Geoscience Department (JMG) had also given its clearance for the condominium project to go ahead after having conducted a study of the land near the temple, PR state executive councillor (exco) Ronnie Liu was reported to have said recently after a meeting with the temple committee, the developer and MPS.

But Senator A. Kohillan Pillay, a former MPS councillor who was also present at today's rally, denied the former state BN government had granted approval for development work.

The Gerakan politician admitted he had been aware of the project since 2007 but stressed that MPS had only given approval for a commercial development proposal on "Lot 622".

"But it is not about the approval for 'Development Planning' to build the 29-storey building," he said.

He backed calls for the PR state government to take responsibility.

The last rally organised to protect the temple complex from potential destruction due to development was in the 1970s and 1980s, when residents near Batu Caves had raged

against two private companies, Dolomite Industries and Kenneison Brothers, who had used dynamite to quarry for marble and allegedly weakened the limestone hill's structure. The then Selangor BN government had issued a stop work order to the two companies in 1980 and relocated them to Sungai Long, in Cheras.

The current condominium project is by Dolomite Properties, and is to be built on one of the former quarry sites which is about 120m from the statue of Lord Murugan at the foot of the hill.

MIC president Datuk Seri G. Palanivel was reported to have endorsed the rally, and urged Indians nationwide to join in the protest.

"The public and NGOs irrespective of political affiliation should show continuous displeasure over the project," he was reported by The Star newspaper as saying yesterday.

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