

Umno-PAS tussle over land rights in KL's Malay village
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 30 — A billboard near a dingy flat in Kampung Baru here proclaims that Titiwangsa Umno will defend every inch of the city's oldest Malay enclave from being taken forcibly.

The message is signed by Barisan Nasional (BN) candidate for the Titiwangsa federal seat Datuk Johari Abdul Ghani, who is facing an uphill struggle in wresting the constituency from PAS in Election 2013, as Kampung Baru landowners fear that their 230-acre land — which is billion-ringgit prime real estate located under the shadow of the iconic Petronas Twin Towers — will be acquired for development.

"There is only one issue that the opposition plays — if landowners and beneficiaries of the land vote for BN, the government will steal the land," said Johari at a walkabout in Taman Maluri here yesterday.

"It's real manipulation. In the Kampung Baru Act, nowhere is it stated that the government will acquire the land. It's to facilitate landowners to develop the land," he added.

Johari stressed that the ruling coalition merely wanted to assist landowners to develop the century-old Malay village, a haphazard tangle of decaying houses and shops caught against the tide of development in the capital city, just a stone's throw away from the upscale Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) mall.

Johari, however, admitted that only about 25 to 30 per cent of the landowners agreed to develop the land, with most wishing to do nothing.

But he noted that the Kampung Baru Development Corporation was set up to recruit investors who could help provide funds to interested landowners who lacked capital, as well as to ensure that they continued receiving financial assistance during the development process.

The businessman slammed his contender for Titiwangsa, PAS's Ahmad Zamri Asa'ad Khuzaimi, for exploiting Kampung Baru voters' fears of BN "stealing their land".

"I have already defended this a long time ago, but the opposition is not hearing my voice. We have changed the Act so many times in Parliament because certain clauses we don't agree. Finally we come to a stage when everyone compromises and says, yes, this is the best," said Johari.

The 113-year-old land originally belonged to Selangor royalty but was bequeathed to the Malay community by Sultan Abdul Samad.

It was in Kampung Baru, the symbol of Malay culture, that the founders of Umno held their early meetings. The historic place was also the starting point of the May 13 race riots in 1969 and later witnessed Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's Reformasi protests in 1998.

Johari pointed out that the government could not “simply acquire the land”, saying that the National Land Code needed to be referred to before the land could be acquired for public purposes.

“Then you have to pay the price for commercial value. If KLCC price is RM2,000, Yap Kwan Seng is RM1,200, Jalan Tun Razak is RM800, so you have to play within that level. You cannot simply take people’s land just to build a road and pay RM200, RM300,” said Johari.

Ahmad Zamri, however, told The Malaysian Insider yesterday that many Kampung Baru landowners were anxious over the government’s development plans, saying that their concerns were not taken seriously and that the Kampung Baru Development Corporation Act 2011 was passed without their input.

On his door-to-door walkabout through Kampung Baru in the rain yesterday, he repeatedly told old residents living in ramshackle houses that PAS would defend Kampung Baru.

Kampung Baru security bureau chief Ab Malek Salleh told The Malaysian Insider yesterday that Kampung Baru landowners would not “simply sell the land”.

“Certain parties can say all sorts of things, such as our land being taken for development. But the fact is, we will never sacrifice our property,” said the 60-year-old, who refused to specify if he supported PAS or BN in Election 2013.

A shopowner near the Kampung Baru mosque questioned the fate of residents if the government was to develop the land.

“We have been staying here for decades. Don’t even talk about selling, we don’t even want to move,” said the 69-year-old, who declined to be named.

“This land was a gift from the Sultan of Selangor then. We will not simply sell the land. Even if we were to sell it, the ones who will develop it are private developers. Who profits from it? We residents won’t get any profits. Even if we were given compensation, how long can the money last?” he added.

But Johari, who was born in a squatter area in Kampung Pandan here in 1964, said that he did not want to see Kampung Baru residents living in the slums, surrounded by modernity and glittering towers.

There are 55,388 voters in Titiwangsa, with the Malays forming the majority at 68 per cent, while the Chinese and Indians comprise 20 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.

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