

**Kit Siang blames Belaga boat tragedy on absence of roads**  
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**By Syed Jaymal Zahiid**

KUALA LUMPUR, May 30 — The root cause of the Belaga boat disaster was Putrajaya's failure to provide road access to Kapit and Belaga despite promising equitable development for Sarawak, DAP stalwart Lim Kit Siang said (picture) today.

The newly-elected Gelang Patah MP noted how the absence of roads in the heavily-populated area had forced residents to use the boat as people are desperate to go home for the Dayak Gawai harvest festival this weekend.

"It is heart-wrenching that despite the express boat tragedy in the middle of the Balui River which is feared to have claimed 11 lives, the Kapit jetty yesterday was as crowded as ever with people desperate to go home for the Dayak Gawai harvest festival this weekend.

"There are a limited number of boats going upriver to the Belaga area and most of the people cannot afford to stay overnight in Kapit until tickets are available. Everyone is afraid of using an express boat as the river currents could be very unpredictable but they have no choice as they cannot use land transport," he said in a statement.

This morning, the body of a man was recovered from the Rajang River where an express boat carrying about 200 people capsized on Tuesday, resulting in 192 passengers being rescued and 11 going missing.

The ill-fated boat, Kawan Mas, was travelling from Bakun to Kapit when it capsized at Jeram Tukok-Jeram Bungan between 8.30am and 9am.

Lim noted how Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has yet to issue any statement on the matter and questioned if the tragedy was even discussed in yesterday's Cabinet meeting.

"In fact, if the tragic Belaga boat disaster had happened before May 5 — Polling Day of the 13th general election — either the prime minister or the deputy prime minister would have visited Belaga with 24 hours to personally convey the condolences of the federal government as compared to the indifference shown by the prime minister and deputy prime minister, who have not said a single word on the Belaga boat disaster in the past two days," he said.

The Najib administration's muted response to the matter also suggested that it was not into rectifying what Lim termed as its "failure" to deliver development in Sarawak despite the state and Sabah having been incorporated into Malaysia 50 years ago.

Road development and connectivity was among the major pledges Najib had promised to Sarawak voters just before the May 5 ballot that saw the state and its neighbour Sabah delivering most of the majority seats it needed to retain power.

Yesterday, the DAP parliamentary leader said both the state and federal governments should respond to the incident immediately by offering an urgent plan to provide road access connecting Bakun, Belaga and Bintulu in Sarawak's interior and following that, a second access to connect Kanowit, Song and Kapit.

Failing which, Lim said the Belaga boat disaster and the lack of development in Sarawak should be made a hot topic in the coming 13th Parliament meeting on June 24.

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