

## **Berembabg — It is not over yet!**

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Ampang,

There were only three houses to be demolished and a number of tents but yet it took hundreds of policemen and women including the FRU, the Developer's people and their thugs to demolish the houses and bring down the fierce resistance put out by the Berembang settlers and the activist who stood with them.

What would in normal circumstances take only half an hour to complete took an entire day and till the last plank was removed, the resistance never surrendered. At the end of the day, the Developer and the police went into an agreement allowing the settlers to camp just outside the current village area and the developer forked out RM 60,000 to pay some compensation. It was astonishing to see the developer who previously refuse to fork out even a cent succumb so fast. A black and white agreement was signed with the developer, the police and the people's representative putting their names on it and the agreement was scrutinized by the settlers representative which would not stop them from taking further action.

The lawyers who were at the scene - Latheefa Koya and later joined by Edmond Bon and Teng Chang Khim all declared that the demolition today was unlawful and the police's action illegal. The police led by ACP Amer Awan though kept maintaining that he was only ensuring the peace took a clear side in assisted the Developer - Perspektif Masa Sdn. Bhd. to carry out this illegal operation. The lawyers seeing the brutality in their own eyes have vowed to take legal action against the developer and those who assisted them at the demolition.

The current legal tussle started when on Monday, the Kampung Berembang Chairperson was served with a letter from Tabian Tahir & Co stating that the Developer of Kampung Berembang -PNSB has obtained an Interim Injunction to prevent the local people from stopping the developer's work.

The same letter states that if the people do not follow the order then the Developer can go for committal proceeding to execute the order. This is normally done after two weeks the first notice is submitted but on that same day, the developer with the full protection of RELA and gangsters from Klang started demolition work. The interim Injunction was not served on the people and legal experts have called this a miscarriage of justice.

With no regards to due process, the developer armed with RELA and gangsters and the police force went on the rampage. To make matters worst, an inter parte hearing was fixed for the 14 th. Of March 2007 which is just next week. The people managed to stop the demolition the other day. This morning, they came back again and it was said that the Selangor Chief Minister himself Khir Toyo instructed the homes be demolished and the Selangor Police Chief carried out the orders to assist the developer.

The people resistance led by 60 remaining settlers has been backed strongly by JERIT and its coalition members - Urban Poor Coalition and the Youth and Student wing Coalition along with Parti Sosialis Malaysia(PSM) led the fierce fight-back. Today's resistance also saw the united front of the opposition parties joining in from PAS, PKR and DAP leaders. Tian Chua was arrested while other leaders such as Dr. Nasir Hashim, S.Arutchelvan, Hatta Ramli and Sallahuddin were all physically

removed from the houses. Later, it was made known that Tian was arrested for “attempting murder” when all he did was break an illegal barricade created by the developer and their thugs to stop outsiders from coming into the village. All in, six people were arrested for various ridiculous reasons but the police though arrested dozen’s of people at every encounter, released them immediately.

This morning, the developers attempted to seal the front entrance and brought in their lorries and machinery to do earth work and remove the peoples belonging as well as demolish the remaining houses. They were met by strong resistance and many fights occurred at numerous occasion. Both sides sustained injuries during these encounters. Two policewomen were removed from the scene - one of them hurting her leg while the other women just broke down and could not handle the pressure.

The settlers and the activist then stay put inside the houses while hundreds of policemen and developers would try to demolish these homes. It would take the police and the developers more than an hour to bring down these houses in spite of their huge numbers. It would normally just take 3 minutes to bring down a settlers house on normal circumstances.

## **Background**

Kampung Berembang is located at Jalan Ampang near Hospital Gleneagles. There were at one time more than a hundred families living here and they have been building this settlement forty years ago. In 2003, the people were promised low-cost houses by Pemodalan Negeri Selangor Berhad, Acmar International and Perspektif Masa Sdn Bhd. These homes were to be built near the current village but these houses are yet to be built.

Under these circumstances, the settlers were given eviction notice on 17/11/2005 to vacate the village. They were not given alternative permanent homes but were offered temporary homes at Puchong - 30km away. The settlers refused and asked for relocation near-by as it is the State Government policy to relocate within 2-3km. The State used the draconian Emergency Clearance of Squatter regulation 1969 and gave the villagers seven days to get out. A group of brave settlers then decided to fight this order and they were assisted by Sdr. Teng Chang Khim - the State opposition leader who was their lawyer for the case.

A temporary injunction ensured their homes were saved initially. On 14 November 2006, the State Government claimed that the land belonged to them while the settlers maintained that land had already been given to a private developer. The court fixed April 30 th. to hear the case. Just three days after that on the 17 November and then on the 20 November, the local council (MPAJ) with the assistance of the police and developers came to demolish the homes. Many people were arrested and injured. The people rebuilt the houses and on 30 November, the houses and the surau(Place of worship) was demolished. The people have since rebuilt their homes until the latest attack on 5 th. March 2007.

## **Aftermath**

After the last house was brutally torn down, some reports have indicated that this is the end of Kampung Berembang. The battle was lost today but the war remains to be fought and won. The people have merely retreated 50 meters outside the current settlement. They have put up their tents. With their original settlement fully closed, the struggle would now focus outside. While the ground was lost today, the spirit remains among some of the settlers who have pledged to carry on the struggle.

The last three days has seen intense struggle between the settlers and the developers. The police, the State and even the courts seem to be with the oppressors. Malaysia with all its wealth cannot resolve the housing issues of its people. There seem to be no political will and the battle for housing rights is far from over – in Berembang, Rimba Jaya and else where.

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