

Temple relocation shelved after chaotic town hall meet

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SHAH ALAM, Sept 5 — Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim has temporarily shelved the relocation of the 150-year-old Sri Mahamariamman Temple to Section 23, following protests from some residents who hijacked what was supposed to be a civil town hall meeting this morning.

The Selangor menteri besar said the state government would look for another location to shift the temple to and would even consider suggestions from local residents for the Selangor Development Corporation (PKNS) to purchase private land some distance from residential homes in Section 23 for the temple.

Khalid downplayed the thuggish behaviour earlier by some residents which disrupted the meeting.

“We expected the strong reaction from some of the residents today, because of their cow head protest last week, and will not be cowed by the group.”

“The problem had been festering for over two decades and we will take it as a challenge to solve the issue,” Khalid said.

He said PKNS has an obligation to find a new site for the temple and more town hall meetings will be held, despite the ruckus today, to allow people to voice their concerns.

Shah Alam MP Khalid Samad, who faced the brunt of the criticism from residents, said the issue had been blown up because of the misinformation which had been fed to these residents.

The residents had claimed the idea to relocate the temple was cast in stone and construction had already begun because hoarding was put up around the site.

They believed the state had by-passed their concerns and felt if they did not voice their protest, the project would have gone ahead despite their objections.

However Khalid said the Selangor government only agreed for the proposal to be considered on August 5 and today's meeting was held to seek the opinions of the residents there.

“I was hoping that the residents would have remained more calm, cool and objective.”

He said the protesters were encouraged to act as they did today by the slow action of the authorities who have yet to act against their earlier cow head protest.

“If today’s episode had happened during the previous Barisan National (BN) administration, they all would have already been arrested.”

From the word go it was clear that those who opposed the temple, many of whom were also involved in the cow head protest last week, were only interested in expressing their intolerance to the idea.

A total of 211 residents from Section 23 attended the meeting at the Shah Alam City Council (MBSA) auditorium and more than one third noisily expressed their objections to the temple and refused to even listen to explanations from the mayor, representatives of the Selangor Development Corporation (PKNS) and the state government.

Khalid Samad also lashed out at Datuk Seri Khir Toyo for continuing to propose all temples in Shah Alam to be relocated to a cluster site in Section 18.

The previous state government had spent RM600,000 to prepare the site meant for seven temples but the idea failed to take off because the temple committees had rejected the idea.

Khalid said the previous state government had first prepared the site, then attempted to arm twist these temple committees to move.

“If I was Dr Khir, I would be ashamed to admit that I have spent so much money without solving the issue.”

Meanwhile Hindu residents of Section 23, which comprised of 48 families, said claims by the cow head protesters that they were against the temple were just not true.

Teacher M. Sekar said the community was unanimous in their support for the temple to be moved to Section 23.

“We want our rights, too,” he said. He added that there were at least 28 other Chinese families who live in Section 28 who did not object.

“If they did, they would be here.”

He said many of his Muslim neighbours also did not have a problem but there are groups who are instigating the issue.

Malaysian Hindu Sangam advisor Datuk A. Vaithilingam told *The Malaysian Insider* they would wait to hear from the state government officially before issuing any statement about the decision to shelve the proposal to relocate the temple.

“Our only regret is that the people involved in the cow head protest, who we hear behaved like hooligans today, have yet to be arrested and charged by the police.”

He said the Hindu community is saddened by this episode and disappointed at the reluctance on the part of the police to take action.