

PM: Pairin wants to prolong issue

13 NOV 1992

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KUALA LANGAT, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan does not want the issue of the 20-point agreement on the formation of Malaysia to be settled because Pairin wants to use it for his party's interests.

Speaking to reporters after launching Genting Sanyen (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd's paper mill complex here, he said Pairin feared that if the Federal Government exposed what had been agreed upon in the agreement, then he could not use it to incite the people.

"He is the one who started the issue by going round telling villagers about the 20-point agreement and alleging that the Federal Government was oppressing Sabah when, in fact, the conditions for Sabah and Sarawak were better than

those for the other states' participation in the federation," he said.

He added that the Federal Government would go ahead with the review of the agreement since it specified that a review needed to be done after 10 years and about 25 years had since passed.

Dr Mahathir said the right to review the agreement did not lie solely with Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) or the Sabah people, as all the people in the country had the right to discuss and ask for a review.

"If we want to have a referendum, it should be held throughout Malaysia, and not just for PBS only," he said in response to reporters' questions.

Pairin, who is PBS president, said yesterday only the people of Sabah could review the 20-point agreement and he questioned Umno's intention to hold a debate on the matter with PBS.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime

Minister Ghafar Baba, speaking to reporters in Kuala Lumpur after receiving Vietnamese Communist Party Politburo member Vu Oanh, said despite Pairin's rejection of a debate on the issue, Umno would send a letter to PBS seeking the debate.

"If he agrees, we can fix a date to have the debate.

"I am saddened. If he (Pairin) rejects it then he should not raise the issue again. We will keep asking him to face us for as long as he raises the issue," he said.

Ghafar also disagreed with Pairin's statement that only Malaysians in Sabah, and not others, can question their own rights and privileges.

"This concerns the administration of the country involving all the people. It does not matter whether he is in the Government or a member of a political party," he added.

Later speaking in Kota Kinabalu Ghafar said RTM would be allowed to broad-

cast live the proposed debate as this would enable the public to follow it.

"We would like the people to follow the debate so that everybody would be satisfied," he told reporters on his arrival on a three-day visit to Sabah.

Meanwhile, PBS secretary-general Datuk Joseph Kurup said he preferred a discussion to a public debate on the issue.

He said dissatisfaction over the agreement should be discussed and solved in an amicable manner.

"We are not talking about a debate... we prefer that it be discussed in an amicable manner," he told reporters after opening a workshop on the 1993 National Budget here today.

Asked if the PBS has already been notified by Umno on the proposed debate, Kurup said he was not aware of it.

"To the best of my knowledge so far... I am not aware of it but it could be already in the process," he said.