

01 MAR 1996

Aliran-Powers

ALIRAN CALLS FOR REVIEW OF SARAWAK CM'S POWERS TOO

KUALA LUMPUR, March 1 (Bernama) -- Aliran today called for a review of the powers of the Sarawak chief minister and that of the chief executives of the other states in line with the Federal government's move to trim the powers of the Sabah chief minister.

The social reform movement said in a statement: "If the authorities are serious in curbing any abuse of power, they should not look at just Sabah. The powers of the Sarawak Chief Minister must be reviewed too."

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who announced the government's intention to curb the powers of the Sabah chief minister, said the chief minister of the state was "too powerful" and he cited as example the abuses in the awarding of timber concessions.

But Aliran said similar abuses could and had occurred in other states as well.

"For instance, relatives of cabinet ministers and state executive councillors have regularly benefited from the allocation of shares of privatised bodies and companies going public and the award of government contracts and timber concessions," it said.

Aliran also questioned the timing of the move on the Sabah chief minister amid the proposed rotation of the post, with Umno expected to relinquish the chief ministership to the leader of another Barisan Nasional component party soon.

It argued that the status of Sabah and Sarawak was not the same as other states because the two states and Peninsular Malaysia came together to form Malaysia in 1963.

For this reason, the scope of powers of their chief ministers could not be compared with those in the peninsula.

Yesterday, a lawyer well-versed with the Federal and State Constitutions, Datuk Param Cumaraswamy, said there were no significant differences between the powers of the chief minister and that of Mentris Besar of other states as well as that of the prime minister.

He said if the Sabah Constitution was to be amended to curb the abuse of power, there was no reason why the Federal Constitution and that of other states should not be amended as well. -- BERNAMA

AU LDB