

01 JUL 1996

Mahathir-Sabah

FEDERAL GOVT PLEDGES TO OVERCOME SABAH'S SECURITY PROBLEM

KUALA LUMPUR, July 1 (Bernama) -- The federal government has given an assurance that it will help Sabah resolve the security problem it has been facing for more than 20 years.

Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee said this assurance was given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at a meeting with Sabah state and federal ministers here today.

Yong said he was satisfied with the pledge by Dr Mahathir and the steps being taken by the federal government to beef up security in the state, especially in the east coast to combat piracy.

At the same time, the state government would draw up a policy and the implementation mechanism for tackling the problem of illegal immigrants and foreign workers in Sabah.

"This includes controlling their entry and managing the activities of foreign workers," he told reporters after the one-hour meeting at the Prime Minister's Department.

Yong said they had also held discussions with the National Security Council (NSC) and State Security and Development Committee on how the Task Force could enhance its role in handling the problem of illegal immigrants and foreign workers.

The state government asked the federal government to hold talks with the Indonesian and Philippine governments to seek ways to stem the inflow of illegal immigrants from their countries to Sabah, he said.

Indonesia has a consulate in Sabah to manage the entry of its workers and Yong hoped that the Philippines would also set up one to do this.

The problem of illegal immigrants and foreign workers was a major issue in Sabah and it should be resolved fast without jeopardising the state's security, he said.

"We now need many workers to develop Sabah but the entry of foreigners should be done through organised and legal means," he said.

On Sabah's development plans, Yong said they told Dr Mahathir about the state's wish to upgrade its network of federal roads under the Seventh Malaysia Plan and this required big allocations.

Yong said the Prime Minister gave an assurance that Sabah's request would be considered during the mid-term review of the Seventh Plan if the state government administration performed well these two years.

"We thanked the Prime Minister because Sabah's allocation under the Seventh Malaysia Plan is 70 percent more than what it received under the previous plan," he said.

Asked whether Sabah political issues were discussed at the meeting, Yong said "yes, but they took a back seat".

Dr Mahathir said Sabah politics had shown signs of increasing maturity and he was confident that any political problems in the state could definitely be resolved, Yong said.

As such, the Barisan Nasional election machinery could be further strengthened between now and the next state election, he added. -- BERNAMA

SJA YBY