

20 MAR 1996

Amendments

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO SABAH CONSTITUTION READY

KOTA KINABALU, March 20 (Bernama) -- A preliminary report on proposals to amend the Sabah state constitution has been completed and it will be discussed by the state cabinet soon, Chief Minister Datuk Mohd Salleh Said Keruak said today.

He received the report from state Attorney-General Datuk Stephen Foo who has been asked to discuss the matter with the federal Attorney-General.

"Whether it can be tabled at the meeting of the State Legislative Assembly next month will depend on the situation," he told reporters after the weekly state cabinet meeting here.

He said though the proposed amendments came under state purview, it was mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and, therefore it was a national matter which required discussions with the federal Attorney-General.

The proposed amendments took into account all aspects relating to the powers of the Chief Minister and it would involve amendments to related enactments and ordinances, he added.

He reiterated that the principle aim was to tighten the existing system and to implement the principle of collective responsibility.

Salleh also said a cabinet committee he headed was conducting a study on forest matters, enforcement and prevention of illegal logging.

The staff shortage faced by the Forestry Department would also be taken into account in the study, he added.

Last Monday, Assistant Minister in the Chief Minister's Department Abdul Rahim Ismail called on loggers to cease the practice of "fell and run" in the state.

Opening a seminar on "Harvesting Technologies and Standards for Sustainable Forest Management" in Sandakan, he said extensive logging in Sabah had gone against the accepted norm.

Following the statement, local environment activist Henry Chok called on the government to review the forest resources management system to protect the environment.

On Sabah's participation in a new airline company, Saeaga Air Sdn.Bhd., Salleh said the government still held to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the Sarawak government and Ekran Air Sdn.Bhd. last November.

Under the MoU, the Sabah and Sarawak governments would each have 40 stake and Ekran Air, an airline company owned by prominent businessman Tan Sri Ting Pek Khiing, the rest.

The equity share of the Sabah and Sarawak governments would be held through their respective airlines, Sabah Air Sdn.Bhd. and Hornbill Skyway Sdn.Bhd.

"We now hold 10 percent in Saeaga Air until we are able to hold the 40 percent stake as proposed," Salleh said.

He said the terms in the MoU were too general and the government had to study all aspects, including the airline's paid-up capital. -- BERNAMA

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