

30 JAN 1997

Rasband-Logs

COMPANY SEEKS RELEASE OF LOGS SEIZED IN TAWAU

KOTA KINABALU, Jan 30 (Bernama) -- Rasband, which is claiming a beneficial interest in the 3,049 logs seized in Tawau on Jan 18, today asked the Sabah Forestry Department to release them to the company.

The company, in a letter sent by its lawyer Sugumar Balakrishnan, warned of legal action against the department and the Sabah government if the department refused its request.

Sugumar said the department was given seven days from today to comply.

A copy of the letter was sent to State Attorney-General Datuk Stephen Foo.

Rasband claimed the seizure of the logs, which were being detained in Wallace Bay near Pulau Sebatik off Tawau, was illegal.

Sugumar said the department could seize the logs if there was any breach of the Forestry Enactment 1968 but the law was inapplicable in this case as the logs were from Indonesia.

Claims by the department that the logs were smuggled in were not true and baseless as the Royal Customs and Excise Department had approved the import of the logs on Jan 17, a day before the consignment was detained, he said.

He also said the Customs had approved on Dec 7 the company's application to transship 980 logs to Tokyo via Tawau.

According to a copy of the letter distributed to reporters here, Rasband had entered a RM2.3 million security bond with the Malaysian government on Jan 13 this year for transshipment of the logs to Japan.

Rasband also said all the logs were imported from Indonesia for which approval was given on Dec 13 by the Primary Industries Ministry.

The company said in the letter that copies of the approval for log imports were sent to the Forestry Department and the Malaysian Timber Industry Board.

It also stated that 2,069 of the logs seized were to be supplied to sawmills in Tawau while the remaining 980 were approved for export to Japan.

Rasband asked the state government to call off the plan to auction the logs as announced by Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee yesterday as it claimed the move was unlawful.

The logs issue attracted wide publicity after state forestry officers detained the Port Klang-registered "MV Able Helmsman" with the consignment of logs in Tawau waters on Jan 18.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim later revealed that six other ships had left Tawau with logs suspected to have been smuggled.

A high-powered committee headed by Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Ghapur Salleh was set up to investigate the case.

A report on the investigation was handed to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Anwar on Tuesday. -- BERNAMA

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