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Koh to seek clarification over Asiaweek report

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PENANG, Fri. - The Penang Chief Minister's office will write a letter of complaint to Asiaweek in response to an article written by its correspondent Roger Mitton.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon said today the letter aimed to seek clarification and explanation regarding inaccuracies in the article.

"Of course, we will complain ... probably one paragraph of complaint.

"I normally do not respond to news reports. I don't make such public statements until now as I thought it was a work of 'irresponsible journalism and mischievous disinformation'," he said when rebutting the insinuations and allegations made in the article entitled A State Of Decline which appeared in the Sept 5 issue. When asked when he would write the letter, Koh replied: "It will be soon."

Koh said Mitton did not interview him although he had sent a faxed message to his office on Sept 14 asking for an interview between Sept 15 and 17.

"I was not available as I was in Kuala Lumpur for a series of meetings.

"When I returned on Sept 18, my Press secretary did not inform me about it as he thought it was over.

"I believe Mitton did not even interview any of the State Executive Councillors or get his facts from the Penang Development Corporation.

"He probably spoke to the Opposition and non-governmental organisations," Koh said.

He added he was more concerned about the damage done to the potential investors than the existing ones.

"The investors who have known Penang well will certainly not be influenced by the article, but I am more worried about the potential investors.

"There is also the tourists who will be coming to Penang for holidays," Koh said.

Mitton had, in the article, alleged that Penang was in a state of decline saying that one major factor was neglect and antipathy by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who gave special attention to his home State, Kedah and its tourist island of Langkawi.

He also alleged that only after Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim takes over as Prime Minister, Penang will receive special attention, "perhaps even at the expense of other States".

Koh in a statement issued on Tuesday said Dr Mahathir and Anwar are both statesmen with national and global perspectives, and it was incorrect and irresponsible for Mitton to insinuate that they were leaders with only narrow parochial interests.

"Such reporting is not responsible journalism, but mischievous disinformation intended to mislead people and to spread discord between the Federal and State Governments."

"It is also illogical. The Prime Minister has been in office since mid-1981. If there has been such neglect and antipathy, how could Penang have grown at an average rate of 12 per cent per annum between 1990 and 1996?"

He added that besides trying to create a split between the leaders, Mitton also tried to create discord between Penang and Kedah.

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