

29/01/1997

Logs issue: Anwar tells all to stop accusations

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim today told all parties involved in the investigations into log smuggling activities in Sabah to stop making accusations and offending statements.

He said it was not right for Barisan Nasional leaders at Sabah and Federal level to conduct themselves in this manner while investigations were being carried out.

He has directed the Anti-Corruption Agency to assist in the investigations which are being co-ordinated by a Federal-level committee headed by the Finance Ministry's deputy secretary-general Datuk Shahbuddin Imam Mohamed.

He said the leaders should allow the investigations to continue without any hindrance or comments which could cause tension and problems.

Anwar said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, at a meeting this morning, had asked him to clear the air.

"We should wait for the investigations to be completed by the committee entrusted with the responsibility.

"There should not be any premature statements which will hurt others.

"Thus, it is not appropriate for Sabah leaders to hurl accusations. The same goes for Federal leaders," he told reporters after chairing the Local Authorities' National Council meeting at the Finance Ministry.

The directive came in the wake of the exchange of words between Deputy Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Abdul Ghapur Salleh and Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik over the log smuggling activities.

Abdul Ghapur, who heads the State investigating committee, claimed that the Malaysian Timber Industry Board, an agency under the Primary Industries Ministry, was aware of logs from Indonesia being smuggled into Sabah and the illegal felling of logs in the State for export.

Dr Lim said his Ministry had never issued any permit for log exports but had given temporary approvals to four companies to do so between October and December last year and called on Ghapur to stop making "irresponsible statements".

Abdul Ghapur retaliated yesterday by saying that Dr Lim was twisting the facts to cover up mistakes committed by his Ministry and its agencies.

The investigations were ordered by Anwar on Jan 20 following the detention of the Port Klang registered vessel MV Able Helmsen at Tawau by the Sabah Forestry Department on suspicion of attempting to export logs without approval.

On the committee headed by Shahbuddin, Anwar said it would take into consideration the reports provided by the Sabah State Government, the Forestry Department, the Customs and Excise Department and the MTIB.

Anwar, who was given a copy of the Sabah State Government report by Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee after the meeting, said the report from the relevant authorities had to be considered before coming to any conclusion.

Anwar said although there was no deadline for the investigation to be completed, the Government wanted it done urgently.

Earlier, Yong, accompanied by Ghapur, submitted the findings of a special State committee to Dr Mahathir at the Prime Minister's Department this morning.

The other members of the committee included Sabah Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia, Sabah Police Commissioner

Datuk Maizan Shaari, Sabah Attorney-General Datuk Stephen Foo, and representatives of the MTIB, the Forestry Department and the Customs Department.

Bernamea quoted Yong as saying that he did not rule out the possibility that "offences" were committed.

Yong said he had asked investigators in the case to take into account the possibility of "dereliction of duty and criminality".

In a statement issued today, the MTIB denied that it had issued a licence to export logs imported into Sabah.

Its director-general Jahaya Mat said the Sabah Forestry Board only approved the export of logs from farmed forests.

"Log exports from natural forests in the State were stopped in 1993.

"However, exports were re-allowed from Nov 1 last year when the State Government approved the export of two million cubic metres of logs from the State.

"The shipment dated Jan 13 this year had been sold to the Malaysian Timber Council in Peninsula Malaysia," Jahaya said, adding that the shipment was undertaken by Syarikat Sabah Forest Industries.

On allegations that there was evidence of export documents being issued by the board, Jahaya said:

"A thorough check has revealed that this document is not an export document.

"The document referred to was in fact related to the import of logs into Sabah on Aug 9 last year."

(END)