

19 AUG 1997

Mahathir-Passport

PASSPORT RULE FOR PENINSULAR M'SIANS STAYS, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUCHING, Aug 19 (Bernama) -- The ruling requiring Malaysians from the peninsula to use passport to visit Sarawak and Sabah will stay for a little longer, prime minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He acknowledged that the requirement was an anomaly within the country but peninsula people "would have to tolerate it a little bit more until Sarawakians feel confident."

"Actually a lot of them are already confident but there are still people who will politicise this thing," he said at a press conference at the Kuching International Airport before leaving for Kuala Lumpur after a two-day visit to Sarawak.

He hoped that over time such requirement would be removed and freer movement between Sarawak/Sabah and peninsula Malaysia could be facilitated.

The immigration requirement, which also stipulates that peninsula Malaysians must apply for work permits for employment in Sarawak and Sabah, is part of the 20-point agreement for the two States to join the Malaysian federation.

Lawyers from the peninsula, who wanted to appear in courts in Sarawak and Sabah, would have to apply for ad hoc admission to the local bar.

The issue became controversial recently when lawyer Karpal Singh urged the government to review the passport requirement, describing it as ridiculous.

Also related to the controversy was deputy minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Nazri Aziz's call for removal of the ad hoc admission ruling so that peninsula lawyers could practise freely in Sarawak and Sabah.

Both the Sarawak Advocates Association and the Sabah Lawyers Association and political leaders in the states took exception and objected strongly to Nazri's remarks.

On his visit, Dr Mahathir said he was satisfied with the rapid development taking place in Sarawak.

He said it was glaring that Sarawak was undergoing rapid development as evident by the numerous buildings and vehicles moving the people about.

"Obviously the economy is doing well," he said.

Other ongoing projects such as the new deep-sea port near here would contribute towards improving Sarawak's economic performance.

The prime minister said a new airport for Kuching will be built on the 808-ha area at km 30 the Kuching-Matang road.

The area was alienated by the state government for the construction of an administrative centre modelled after the new federal administrative capital in Putrajaya near Kuala Lumpur.

Chief minister Tan Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud announced the granting of the land at the opening of an arch commemorating the 40th year of Malaysia's independence by Dr Mahathir at Matang earlier today.

At the press conference Dr Mahathir did not elaborate on the proposed airport, merely saying that "people would say we are wasting again."

"But I can assure you we don't do anything silly in this country. Silly things that we do always turn out to be sensible things," said the prime minister.

Abdul Taib, when approached later after sending off Dr Mahathir, told reporters that the state government had allocated the land to allow for the expansion of Kuching city.

He said it was up to the federal government to utilise the land.

"But we have not discussed in detail the airport proposal. We'll only use the land when we decide to build the airport," Abdul Taib added.--

BERNAMA

opp+mt rn