

20/08/1997

PM hopes for freer movement within States

Ashraf Abdullah

KUCHING, Tues. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed hope that the requirement for Malaysians from the peninsula to produce travel documents when entering Sabah and Sarawak would be abolished in the near future.

Describing the passport requirement for Malaysians to travel within their own country as "not normal," Dr Mahathir said its abolition would facilitate freer movement between the people of Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak.

"But we have to tolerate this for a little bit more, until Sarawakians feel confident. Actually a lot of them are already confident but there is always somebody who will politicise these things.

"I hope in time that the requirement will be removed and freer movements between Sabah and Sarawak will be facilitated," he said in response to a question on whether the requirement should be reviewed.

Currently, Malaysians from the peninsula must either produce their passports or identity cards for entry into Sabah and Sarawak. For each entry, they will be allowed to stay for three months, after which they will have to leave the States.

These requirements stem from special privileges guaranteed to Sabah and Sarawak to overcome the reluctance of the two Borneo States to join the federation in 1963.

These concessions, based on the Cobbold report, inputs from the Inter-Governmental Committee and local political parties in the two states, were generally referred to as the 20-point agreement.

It deals with matters like religion, language, constitution, head of the Federation, name of the Federation, Immigration, Education, Citizenship, Federal Legislature, State Constitutions, legislative powers, financial provisions, elections, judiciary, public services, indigenous races, existing laws, transitional arrangements, international agreements for financial and technical aid, land, local government and emergency powers.

But lately, in the name of fostering national integration, and peeved by the seeming unfairness of certain concessions, calls are being made for a review of the agreement.

Earlier at a ceremony to unveil an arch to commemorate Malaysia's 40th year of independence in Matang, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia's growth was made possible by the unity maintained by its people.

"We have managed to leave behind the parochialism and narrow tribalism to work together for a successful Malaysia," he said.

"As we are united, we managed to bring about rapid development. I am quite sure Malaysia would not have achieved what it has achieved if the people were not united and lived in a state of chaos."

Dr Mahathir said although minor problems between the Federal and State Governments were inevitable, they were normally solved through friendly discussions.

He added that the 808 hectares donated to the Federal Government by the Sarawak Government would be used to build Federal Government departments. The size of the site is equivalent to 2020 acres, a reference to vision 2020, the national aspiration of attaining developed-nation status by year 2020.

"We also plan to build a new airport here," he said.

Dr Mahathir hoped that the area would become an administrative centre

similar to Putrajaya.

(END)