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Logs-Report

REPORT ON SABAH LOG SMUGGLING READY NEXT WEEK

KOTA KINABALU, Jan 25 (Bernama) -- A report on the findings of a high-powered investigation into alleged log smuggling from Tawau is expected to be submitted to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim on Monday.

This was stated today by Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Ghapur Salleh, who headed the investigation committee.

Other members of the committee were state Agriculture and Fisheries Minister Datuk Pandikar Amin Mulia, state police chief Datuk Maizan Shaari, state Attorney-General Datuk Stephen Foo, Natural Resources Secretary Datuk William Shim and representatives of the Malaysian Timber Industry Board, Forestry Department and Royal Customs and Excise Department.

The investigation was ordered by Anwar during his visit to Tawau last Monday, following the detention of cargo ship MV Able Helmsman for suspected log smuggling.

Forestry officers seized the ship near Pulau Sebatik on Jan 18 and found aboard 3,049 logs which allegedly were being exported without a permit.

Anwar said he wanted the case investigated, as well as how six other ships suspected of exporting logs illegally left Tawau apparently unnoticed by the authorities.

In KUALA LUMPUR today, the Deputy Prime Minister said he had appointed Deputy Secretary-General (Operations) of the Finance Ministry, Datuk Shahbuddin Imam Mohamed, to coordinate the log smuggling investigation.

Anwar, who is the Finance Minister, said this to reporters after he witnessed the signing of a RM2.2 billion syndicated Al-Bai Bithaman Ajil notes issuance facility to KL International Airport Berhad.

Ghapur also said the state government would clarify with the federal government regarding which authority had the power to issue log export permits in Sabah.

He said the clarification would avoid overlapping of powers between the Sabah Forestry Department and the Primary Industries Ministry.

"If there are two bodies individually empowered to approve log export permits, problems will arise because we will not know whose directive should be obeyed," he told reporters after receiving donations for victims of tropical storm Greg totalling RM112,485 from Golden Hope Plantation, Tawau Wanita Barisan Nasional and Felda Umas-Umas.

Ghapur said the Sabah Forestry Department had the ultimate authority to approve log exports from the state.

He was asked to comment on a reported statement by Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik yesterday that the ministry had issued an export permit to a company in Tawau to export excess logs.

Dr Lim reportedly said the approval was valid until Dec 31 last year.

-- BERNAMA

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