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Sarawak lawyers happy with Dr M's statement

KUCHING, Mon. - The Advocates Association of Sarawak considers the view expressed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on lawyers having to apply for an ad hoc licence when appearing in courts in Sarawak and Sabah as something positive.

Its president, Sulong Matjeraie, said today that Dr Mahathir was fully aware of the feelings of the people in the two States.

"I am happy to hear when Dr Mahathir stated that the Governments of the two States are still not ready to open their doors to professionals from peninsular Malaysia," he said when commenting on the Prime Minister's statement.

Dr Mahathir said in Alor Star yesterday that he had talked with the Sarawak and Sabah Governments and they were of the opinion that they had not reached a stage where they could open their doors to professionals from the peninsula.

He made the statement in response to a call by lawyer and Jelutong MP Karpal Singh that the Prime Minister intervene in the issue pertaining to lawyers from the peninsula having to apply for the ad hoc licence and work permits before they could appear in courts in the two States.

Sulong said the statement by Dr Mahathir should put to rest once and for all the need to apply for the ad hoc licence by lawyers from the peninsula.

He added that as long as lawyers from the peninsula had the right skills there would not be any problem for them to be granted the ad hoc licence by the Chief Justice of Sarawak and Sabah Datuk Chong Siew Fei.

"Since December last year, the Chief Justice had approved 13 applications from lawyers from the peninsula alone," he said.

Sulong said that he could not understand why there was so much fuss about the need to apply for the licence when lawyers from Sarawak were having difficulties when they wanted to practise in the peninsula.

"Under the Legal Professions Act, lawyers from Sarawak, no matter what skills they have or how long they have been in practice, are required to do a nine-month chambering before they can even appear in court," he said.

Sulong felt that there was no need to do the chambering since lawyers in Sarawak were equally good as those in peninsular Malaysia.

Early this month, Sulong had said that the association was against any move to do away with laws requiring lawyers from outside the State to apply for the ad hoc licence for permission to appear in courts in the State.

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