

07/10/2000

Need for comprehensive study before resettling islanders

KOTA KINABALU, Fri. - A comprehensive survey needs to be carried out before any decision is taken to resettle islanders off Sabah to the mainland, Chief Minister Datuk Seri Osu Sukam said.

He hoped the Defence Ministry would discuss the matter with the State Government before it was implemented, he told reporters after launching the State-level Farmers Day here.

Osu was reacting to a statement by Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak yesterday that his Ministry was studying the possibility of resettling remote islanders off Sabah to minimise their vulnerability to abduction by foreign intruders and pirate attacks.

It would require a combined military and police survey of 94 inhabited islands off Sabah to assess whether the security threats there merited evacuation of the islanders.

The Defence Minister said the resettlement was one of three security measures which Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad mooted at a briefing for the Ministry last week.

Osu said the survey was necessary as the number of people inhabiting the many islands off Sabah were substantial.

"Their way of living as islanders must be taken into account if they are resettled to the mainland they may have problems to adjust to life as the situation is different," he said.

The Chief Minister also said that he does not know if the resettlement move was final or only a proposal.

"But certainly, there are many things which needed to be considered," he said without elaborating further.

In Kuala Lumpur, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Chor Chee Heung said the plan to relocate the people to islands where security had been beefed up was the best solution to ensure their safety.

He said the residents should realise the importance of relocating them, despite the inconveniences they may face, and give the authorities their fullest co-operation.

(END)