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Rais to meet Rulers in move to `activate' State pardons boards

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KUANTAN, Sat. - The Pardons Board in most of the States have not been meeting regularly, some of them for years, resulting in a backlog of 243 cases which include a number of death row cases.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said he would be seeking audiences with the Sultans (as heads of the respective State Pardons Board) and Yang di-Pertua Negeris to discuss the matter.

"There seems to be a lull in most of the States. We want to `activate' all the Boards. The Pardons Board is the venue of last resort for those who had been sentenced and the process of justice should move unhindered," he said.

The Pardons Board is the last chance for convicted prisoners to get pardons for all offences.

The highest number of pending cases are in Sarawak with 38 followed by Perak (37), Johor (33), Kedah (31), Pahang (27), Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur and Labuan (19), Selangor (17), Penang (12), Malacca and Kelantan (eight each), Sabah (five), Perlis (four), and Negri Sembilan and Terengganu (two each).

Rais added that the delays were due to the process of compiling data and reports from the various agencies like the Attorney-General's Chambers, courts, police and Prisons Department.

"The process to streamline the procedures is an on-going one and at last, we have achieved that desired momentum, paving the way for the various Pardons Boards to meet on a regular basis," he said.

On Thursday, Rais had a meeting with the Attorney-General's Chambers where this issue was also discussed.

He said the A-G played a pivotal role in making sure that the Pardons Board moves and "I am happy that Datuk Ainum (Mohd Saaid ) is set to clear the backlog".

He added that Ainum had also agreed to attend the Pardons Boards' meetings.

Rais had an audience with the Sultan of Pahang today as the head of the Pardons Board in Pahang, the first of his planned meetings with the Rulers.

He said the Sultan agreed that the Pahang Pardons Board, which last met in 1996, will sit on April 4 to clear the 27 cases pending before it.

Four are death row cases including that of bomoh Mona Fandey, five are for reviews of jail sentences, and one case involved a prisoner being held at the pleasure of the Sultan.

Mona Fandey (her real name is Maznah Ismail), her husband Mohd Affandi Abdul Rahman and their assistant Juraimi Husin were sentenced to death for the 1993 murder of former Batu Talam State Assemblyman Datuk Mazlan Idris in Raub.

On April 13, 1999, they failed in their final appeal when the Federal Court upheld the conviction and sentence imposed by the Temerloh High Court in 1995, following which they filed petitions for clemency.

Rais also said the Sultan of Pahang had asked for an annual schedule of cases to be sent to him for him to convene the Pardons Board regularly.

"I am grateful that the Sultan has accepted the suggestion for regular meetings. I believe that the other States will also emulate the example.

"I must thank the Ruler for his outright, ready disposition to push forward the demands of justice in a larger sense," he said.

Also present at the meeting at Istana Abu Bakar in Pekan were Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob and State Legal Adviser Datuk Abdul Halim Aman.

Asked why he chose to meet the Sultan of Pahang first, Rais said Pahang did not have a major problem but "we feel that the Sultan is someone who can implement the pardon process and it is therefore apt to pick Pahang to lead the way".

Rais added that his next stop would be Sarawak, followed by Johor, Perak and Kedah.

He added that he would also be briefing the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who would advise the Yang di-Pertuan Agong about the cases in the Federal Territories. This reflected the Government's seriousness in handling the matter.