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Sarawak-Banks

S'WAK DISAPPOINTED WITH NOT HAVING ANCHOR BANK, SAYS TAIB

By: Azman Ujang

KUCHING, Jan 15 (Bernama) -- Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said the state is disappointed at not being allocated an anchor bank following the recent mergers of commercial banks despite its history of owning several banks.

But he said despite the disappointment, he did not use his influence to try to obtain an anchor bank for the state because he had to respect national policies.

" Many people are disappointed but like anybody else I follow national policies," Taib said in a recent interview at his office here.

He was asked to comment on the merger exercise scheduled to be completed by the end of last year and the aborted merger between Sarawak-owned Bank Utama and the Arab-Malaysian Bank group.

Both Bank Utama and Arab-Malaysian have called off their proposed merger following disagreement over the question of control, with Bank Utama now contemplating merger with EON Bank instead.

Asked why he did not use his influence with the federal government to get an anchor bank for the state, Taib said: "This is a national policy. If it works, it works, if it doesn't work it would be up to the government to find an alternative policy".

" I never asked for it. I never asked for anchor bank. If I were to ask for an anchor bank, I would have done it and do you think I would not get it," he asked.

He also said that it would up to Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin or Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to decide on it.

" And I would have to respect their judgment".

The chief minister said he realised that many people in Sarawak had hoped that he would seek what market talk described as an 11th anchor bank, in addition to 10 such banks decided under the exercise.

" I can understand the overall philosophy (for the mergers). If it is well and good, I will just have to keep quiet," Taib added.

Asked on the failed merger between Bank Utama, the banking arm of the public-listed Cahya Mata Sarawak Berhad (CMSB), Taib said: " Well, commercial views are such, they will decide what is good and make an offer or agree on certain things, but (Bank Utama) decided not to follow through. It doesn't matter to us (the state government). I don't intervene as chief minister".

On the appointment of the new Yang Dipertua Negeri to succeed Tun Ahmad Zaidi Mohammed Noor who died on Dec 5, the chief minister said he was leaving the matter to the prime minister.

He said the appointment was expected to be made once the 40-day mourning period -- due to end today -- was over.

" That is the normal way. We don't appoint one when we are still observing the mourning period for 40 days. It has been the tradition. I cannot anything more".

Asked why former Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Mohamed Salahuddin was made acting head of state and not any other personality, the chief minister explained that this was done out of convenience.

Taib said if someone else was appointed in an acting capacity, the person would have to give up whatever posts he was holding, including directorships in companies.

-- BERNAMA

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