

26/08/2002

Bill on witness protection

Hamidah Atan

KUALA KLAWANG, Sun. - The Government has agreed to enact a law for the protection of witnesses, especially those involved in high-profile cases.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Rais Yatim said police had submitted a report on the matter to the department's legal co-ordination division.

"The police, with the approval of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, have proposed that a Witness Protection Bill be drafted," he said after a senamrobik session with 400 Jelebu district leaders, government officers and villagers today.

Rais, who is also Jelebu MP, said the drafting process was complex.

"We have to be very careful and meticulous to avoid overlapping with existing laws. We also need to incorporate provisions into other laws to make its enforcement meaningful and effective."

Rais said the police had been asked to set up a division to monitor enforcement.

"I am working closely with the committee. It is my hope that this law can protect those who are willing to testify as witnesses, especially in important and high-profile cases."

Rais said with such laws in place, witnesses need no longer fear for their safety, lives or damage to their properties.

He said such laws had long been enforced in countries like Britain and the United States.

On the detention of 19 Malaysian tourists by Indonesian policemen at Lake Toba in Medan, Rais said the Indonesian Government had not made any official stand on the incident.

"I am sure the incident is not a retaliation against the caning of Indonesian illegal immigrants here."

Rais said the incident was more of an expression of "political sentiment" by quarters who were unhappy with the move taken by the Malaysian Government against illegal immigrants.

"Every country has its own laws and regulations. I am wondering why some leaders and parties in Indonesia still do not understand this."