

Sarawak minister okays underground radio
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Sarawak Land Development minister James Masing raised eyebrows by not only granting an interview to underground broadcaster Radio Free Sarawak, but by also actually giving his approval to the independent station.

At the end of his 50-minute interview, which went to air on Nov 18 and is available online, Masing endorsed (right) the radio station saying that "other (Sarawak) ministers would be happy to talk (to the station because) it is very nice".

The PRS chief also gave thumbs up to blogs and websites, highly critical of the government, including Sarawak Report and Malaysia Today, saying that there is no way to stop them.

"You cannot stop free information. Bloggers are everywhere, you cannot stop them... You cannot stop people from talking about you, what is important is that you do not do (the things you are accused of).

"I'm quite interested in (Malaysia Today editor) Raja Petra Kamarudin's comments... I like his ideas, some quite out of this world. But certainly you need to raise some things like these," he said.

A check with the minister's office confirmed that he had indeed given an interview to the London based station.

'I cannot pressure Taib'

In the candid interview, Masing told the host, known only as Papa Orang Utan, that he alone could not pressure Chief Minister Taib Mahmud into stepping down and that was not for lack of trying.

"I cannot pressure (him) - 1987, I tried, 1991, I tried. This coming election we'll see. Those who do not want him, whether majority or minority, this election will decide. I cannot do it on my own," he said but was quick to add that he is still a BN man.

NONEHe also said that the government and logging companies share the blame for the 50km logjam in the Rajang River, which the former had described as a natural disaster.

Masing said that the logging companies, operating in Sarawak for over three decades broke permit restrictions by extracting timber less than 500m from the river bank, which led to the disaster following a heavy downpour.

But at the same time, according to the Iban minister government agencies should also shoulder some of blame for lax enforcement.

"Lack of man power is not an excuse to me. If you're lacking get some more," he said, adding that the Iban community should help out by reporting breaches by timber companies.

"The Iban at the moment are angry, but it's manageable. If it happens again, it would be a problem. You and I would not be able to manage the anger. It's a wake up call," he said.

'We should not protest'

He, however, has reservations over whether this emotion could lead to a change in government.

"(Democracy) will come during the election. Unless an election is not allowed, then we should not protest. As long as an election is held every five years then democracy is in practice," he said.

Masing spoke to Radio Free Sarawak during its fifth broadcast since its launch last week. So far in its 11 broadcasts, the station has interviewed grassroots leaders, activists and politicians, including PKR Sarawak chief Baru Bian and DAP Sibuluan MP Wong Ho Leng.

It is still unclear who is behind the radio station, which judging from the number of comments left on its website, has been steadily attracting a rising amount of interest.

The station also transmits via shortwave on frequency 7590 kHz from 6.30am to 7.30pm and on 15680 kHz from 6am to 7pm.

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