

Sarawak's bid for boutique airline gets PM's support

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KUCHING: Sarawak's plans to have its own boutique airline took a step closer to being realised with approval in principle from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Anwar said he would bring up Sarawak's request for the airline to be discussed at the Cabinet meeting tomorrow, after which an official reply would be given to the state.

"In principle, I don't see why we should object, as Sarawak has a proven track record of good management," he said when opening the Raia Hotel and Convention Centre here yesterday.

"Sarawak has been taking the lead in many areas, such as electric vehicles and hydrogen energy, and setting an example in running the state. In view of Sarawak's good performance, I agree to the state's request for a boutique airline," he said, in an immediate response to Sarawak Premier Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg, who had raised the request in his speech.

Abang Johari said high air fares were a problem faced by travellers coming to Sarawak.

"We are requesting to form a boutique airline, not to compete but to stabilise the air fares.

"The state government is ready to invest in a small airline to bring in visitors," he said.

Last November, Abang Johari said Sarawak was waiting for a licence to be issued by the Transport Ministry so that the proposed boutique airline could begin operations.

He said the boutique airline would be set up as a commercial wing under Hornbill Skyways.

"We have conducted a study on setting up the airline, and the result indicates that it can be done.

"What's left is to wait for the approval of the licence," he had said.

Meanwhile, Anwar also said the large allocations for Sabah and Sarawak in Budget 2023 were part of the Federal Government's obligations to both states as spelt out in the Malaysia Agreement 1963.

At the same time, he said, Sabah and Sarawak had been lagging behind Peninsular Malaysia over the years.

"We must fulfil our obligations, and we must be fair.

"We have three blocs - Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak - and being fair means giving each one their due, he said.