Warning over native land

ASSURANCE: Genuine cases will be protected, but schemers will be dealt with

CHIEF Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman has assured natives, who live in the forests, that their rights will be protected.

At the same time, Musa asserted that opportunists, who make false claims of Native Customary Rights (NCR) land, would be dealt with if they were detected.

He said there were genuine natives who belonged to the forests, but there were also those who would concert elaborate scams to try to secure land which was not rightly theirs for selfish gains.

In commenting on a move to reclassify 36 plots of forest reserves across the state recently, including a few villages within the protected areas, Musa said the government had always been sensitive to the needs of the people.

Musa said the amendment to the Forests (Constitution of Forest Reserves and Amendment) Enactment 1984 would see communities living in forest reserves getting the rights to stay on.

Of the total, four of the protected land reclassified were villages occupied by natives since the time of their forefathers. The converted land involved is located in Ulu Telupid and Lipaso in Ranau, Kuala Tomani in Tenom and the Tawau Mangrove Forest in Tawau.

Musa said Land and Survey officers, forest rangers, elected representatives had all been ordered to look into every complaint on NCR land.

“We have found those who were genuine as well as claims that we made by opportunists,” he said, adding that the officers had reported on how some people even go to the extent of “planting” cemeteries or makeshift houses just to prove their claims.

“There are people who will do anything to secure land that is not theirs by right.”

“So, be assured we have our ways to countercheck their claims.”

Musa said the officers would seek clarification from community leaders, historical records and agricultural activities before approving any NCR claim.

This was also where in certain areas the government would propose issuing communal titles if claims were made collectively so as to better protect the NCR land.

He said the conversion of land approved by the state assembly last month would pave the way for the development of a new campus proposed by Universiti Teknologi Mara in Sook and the Sabah Oil and Gas Industrial Park (SOGIP) in Sipitang.

For the proposed UiTM, about 1,012ha of land will be excised from the Sook Plains Forest Reserve in Keningau while for the SOGIP project, 1,008ha will be excised from the Mengalong Forest Reserve in Sipitang.

The move will also reduce the size of forests that can be logged, increase water catchments, create buffer zones to prevent degradation of forests, areas where there are many wildlife species and even unique plants.