

## **IMM13 still issued in Sabah despite freeze, RCI told**

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**By Aidila Razak**

SABAH RCI A document that had been issued to refugees by the Immigration, Department and which was supposed to have been frozen in 1984 had been issued again, at least twice, in 2007 and in 2010.

The royal commission of inquiry into illegal immigrants in Sabah heard that two sisters born in Tawau to Filipino parents, who held the IMM13 at the time of their births, received their own IMM13 after applying at the Sabah Immigration Department.

Eugelynn, 33, and Ergelynn Esperilla, 26, who have lived in Sabah all their lives, told the commission that they have since traded their IMM13 for visit passes and were applying for permanent residency.

Ergelynn, the youngest of five siblings, said she applied and was interviewed for the refugee status document, the IMM13, in 2009 and received it in 2010.

Second-born Eugelynn, on the other hand, applied for hers in 2007, upon advice of the National Registration Department after not getting word about her application for her identity card since 1988.

However, the Sabah government reportedly said in 2010 that the IMM13 can be issued to children of IMM13 holders.

Eugelynn said she applied for it separately from her parents, while Ergelynn said that her father was with her when she was interviewed for the document.

Eugelynn enrolled in a government secondary school using a IC application receipt, which she received when she applied for it at the age of 12, while her sister enrolled using her birth certificate.

"I could not enroll in Form Six, despite receiving an offer as I did not have an IC," Ergelynn told the RCI.

'Land border easy to cross'

Earlier, the RCI heard that the Sarawak Immigration Department stopped issuing the IMM13 in 1975. These were issued to the people displaced by the Confrontation

with Indonesia.

Sarawak Immigration Department director Robert Lian @ Robert Saging said that of the total 2,694 IMM13 issued in Sarawak, only 275 "active" holders have been renewing their documents every year.

Lian said the others may have died, as the passes were issued four decades ago. Others have returned to their home countries, while others married locals and are eligible for other permits.

He also testified that the Sarawak land border with Indonesia is about 1,400km long, about as long as Sabah's sea border with the Philippines.

"A land border is easy to move across as it can be done in the day or night," Lian told the RCI, which is sitting at the High Court Complex in Kota Kinabalu.

However, he said, the biggest challenge for border control in Sarawak is that the border includes very remote areas which the department has no capacity to monitor.

"Most of the time our checkpoints are at areas with provision shops or markets where (the immigrants) sell their wares.

"We don't want to put our officers where they have to stay by themselves, because it is quite wild out there," Lian said to a question from commissioner Herman Luping.

He said Sarawak has 31 border checkpoints - 14 reachable by land, 10 by sea and seven by air.

He also testified that Malaysia and Indonesia have a border agreement signed in 1967 that allows free access for those who live along the border, most of whom have relatives from either side.

However, Lian added, the passes held by these people only allow them access to certain parts of the two countries and not all over Malaysia or Indonesia.

