

Blue IC sent to foreigners even in jungle, RCI told

MalaysiaKini.com

July 2, 2013

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SABAH RCI The illegal granting of blue identity cards was so widespread that even foreigners working in the jungle were offered the document, the royal commission of inquiry (RCI) on immigrants in Sabah heard today.

One such recipient, Maming Saleng, 63, from Sulawesi, said he arrived in Sabah in 1981 using an Indonesian passport and went on to work with logging companies in Kinabatangan.

"My manager at the logging camp asked me if I needed an identity card, so I said yes," he testified at the Kota Kinabalu court complex today.

Subsequently, Maming said, two unknown men went to the camp to process their applications. They took the pictures of him and his co-workers, their thumb prints and also filled up their forms.

Maming said he paid them RM50, and two months later when the men returned to the logging camp with his blue identity card, he was required to pay another RM100.

Maming, who effectively became a citizen two years after arriving from Indonesia, said around 20 of his co-workers at the logging camp also received their blue identity cards, together with him.

His identity card states that he was born in Sandakan, and Maming has, ever since then, voted in that constituency during elections.

"I also applied for a Malaysian passport and have returned to Indonesia twice with it," he said.

'Coffeeshop IC'

Another witness who took the stand was Ahmad Soso, 53, who was also from Sulawesi. He said he arrived in Tawau in 1978, on an Indonesian passport.

Ahmad, who was only 14 years old then, said he worked at several plantation companies until 1981, when he then went to Ranau to work as a construction worker.

Later, he received information that he could get a blue identity card in Kota Kinabalu and travelled to the city with his friends.

"I met a Bugis man in Kota Kinabalu and he took me to a house that had a family living in it.

"The man in the house filled in the form for me, took my fingerprints and asked me to pay RM10 stamp duty," he said.

Ahmad said the man called him three months later and passed the blue identity card to him at a coffeeshop in Kota Kinabalu.

The identity card carried the code '12', stating that he was born in Sabah, he added.

"I have voted in every election, except in 1990. At that time I was supposed to vote in Kudat, it was too far as I lived in Ranau. It (the voting centre) was later changed to Ranau," Ahmad said.

'Illegal ICs from the authorities'

When it was pointed out by conducting officer Jamil Aripin that his identity card was illegally obtained as it must be issued by the National Registration Department's office, Ahmad insisted he had done no wrong.

"I was registered (according to the process). It is just that I was asked to take it at a coffeeshop. So I went to the coffeeshop," he said.

Earlier, former Chief Judge of Sabah and Sarawak Steve Shim (left), who heads the RCI, noted that such illegal identity card recipients were of the view that they had done no wrong as the document was in fact from the authorities, albeit not issued according to law.

"So long as they are issued by the relevant authorities, to them (recipients), the ICs are valid.

"They can be born in Timbuktu but if the identity card says they were born in Sabah, and this IC was issued by the authorities, that will be the perception.

"The question is, who is to be blamed?" Shim asked.

A total of eight witnesses testified today, the second day of the sixth RCI hearing session.

Since the first hearing in January, a total of 155 witnesses have taken the stand before the RCI.

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