

## **'Najib's BN finally has political will to tackle illegals'**

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**By Nigel Aw**

SABAH RCI The BN under Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak finally has political will in resolving the flood of illegal immigrants in Sabah, says state Deputy Chief Minister Joseph Pairin Kitingan.

This, he testified before the royal commission of inquiry (RCI) on immigrants in Sabah today, was after decades of unwillingness by the federal government to address the problem.

"Indications at the moment with the present leadership are that they have the political will to act when the RCI comes out with its recommendations," he testified at the Kota Kinabalu Court Complex.

Joseph Pairin Kitingan (left), who is the 199th witness, said the fact that Najib had consented to the setting-up of the RCI to look into the issue of illegal immigrants was a display of political will.

He lamented that prior to this, BN component parties in Sabah had pleaded with the federal government on the matter, especially near general elections, but received nothing more than promises.

This, he said, included a manifesto that was delivered to then-prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Pairin, who was Sabah chief minister under Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) from 1985 to 1994, said he wished he could have done more to solve the illegal immigrant issue but said his government was plagued by instability.

"At that time, we had demonstrations and defections, they were among the factors that made us unable to address the problem," he said.

Pairin had broken away from BN component party Berjaya to form PBS a month before the 1985 state elections, and went on to secure a majority to form the state government.

The Keningau MP said that when he had raised the issue of illegal immigrants in 1978, his then-Berjaya party leadership had reprimanded him.

"I was not clear as to the reason why they were not happy, but they just told me not to talk about it," he said.

BN's ouster led to a period of instability and the RCI has heard that efforts were made to alter Sabah's demography to weaken PBS's support base which is made up of Kadazandusun and Chinese.

Pairin concurred that illegal immigrants were included into the electoral roll that ultimately led to PBS winning by a slim majority in 1994, and subsequently being toppled by defections.

"We had complained to the Election Commission to remove the dubious names and they did.

"But in the subsequent general election we found some of the names back on the electoral roll," he said.

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