

Wary of Rohingyas being placed in Penang

MalaysiaKini.com

May 28, 2015

By Susan Loone

Penang Deputy Chief Minister II P Ramasamy is taking whatever BN or Umno says on the Rohingya issue with a huge pinch of salt.

"I did not say we push away the refugees - I expressed my doubts and suspicions over their suggestion to settle them in Penang," he said in a press conference today.

Ramasamy was referring to criticisms levelled against him by Umno Kepala Batas MP Reezal Merican Naina Merican.

Reezal (photo) was quoted in the media, labelling Ramasamy as "rude, excessive, tasteless and acting in malice" for allegedly comparing the life and death of the refugees with "Project IC".

In a comment headlined 'The Politics of Sheltering Rohingyas' published in Malaysiakini on May 25, Ramasamy raised the alarm of a 'Project IC' situation developing.

He said some quarters were concerned that the federal government might have an ulterior motive in locating the boat people in Penang.

"Some have even gone to argue that, given the nefarious Project IC in Sabah some years back, some unscrupulous leaders in Malaysia might be prone to start a similar project in Penang just to unseat the Penang government," Ramasamy had stated.

In response, Reezal slammed Ramasamy (photo) for allegedly assuming the suggestion to place the Rohingya refugees in Penang was a "political ploy" by the federal government.

He questioned if Ramasamy was echoing the stance taken by DAP on humanitarian issues.

"I do not trust what BN or Umno say," responded Ramasamy today. "They are always up to something.

"Previously, there had been the issue of Project IC in Sabah. I questioned if a similar project may be hatched in Penang," stressed the DAP national deputy secretary-general.

Peace processes

Ramasamy said he was willing to forgive Reezal but the latter must not remain "ignorant" and "blindly point fingers at others" over the issue.

He added Reezal should be aware that he (Ramasamy) was involved in several peace processes including in Aceh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

It was better for Reezal to slam those who exploited the refugees for monetary gains by trafficking, Ramasamy declared.

“In the past, I had asked the government to provide temporary shelter to those fleeing the violence in Acheh, so do not say those things about me,” he said.

Ramasamy added the federal government has yet to discuss or contact the Penang government on the matter, despite a barrage of criticism against the state’s stand on the proposal of settling the refugees here.

Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng (photo) has maintained that it stands with Putrajaya when it comes to national security but was less willing to accept the refugees due to the high population density in the state.

This remark courted criticisms from Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi who questioned the Penang’s government’s sincerity in wanting to help the Rohingyas.

Ramasamy said the Rohingya crisis - where thousands were stranded at sea after fleeing violence in Myanmar - should be addressed by the federal government.

However, Penang is willing to cooperate with the federal government on how to settle the refugees, who are mostly Rohingyas and Bangladeshi migrants, he added.

“This is not just Malaysia’s problem, it is a regional crisis and needs a humanitarian solution especially after several death camps have been recently discovered at the Thai-Malaysian border,” said the Prai assemblyman.