

Upko up in arms over refugees' IMM13 papers
Malaysiakini.com
August 01, 2010

The United PasokMomogun KadazanDusunMurut Organisation (Upko) is crying foul on the number of IMM13 documents issued to refugees by the Immigration Department. These refugees are all from the southern Philippines who fled the conflict zone in the early 1970s.

The party notes that the federal government has 57,000 IMM13 holders as against the state government's 84,000 IMM13 holders. Chief Minister Musa Aman confirmed the state figure last Tuesday in an update. He also added that he did not issue any IMM13 to new arrivals.

The 27,000 difference between both figures, Upko fears, is the number of refugees issued permanent residence by the federal government without the consent of the Sabah state government.

NONE"Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Aziz (right) has informed Parliament that there was no need to consult the Sabah state government on the issuance of permanent residence to refugees holding the IMM13 document," said Upko secretary-general Wilfred Madius Tangau. "This is not what the law states."

Tangau, who has been pursuing the IMM13 issue in Parliament for the last eight years, is dissatisfied with the federal and state versions of the issue following Musa's update. He wants answers.

For starters, he wants to know the actual number of IMM13 document holders in Sabah and how many have been given permanent residence in Sabah by the federal government. He also wants confirmation on whether the Sabah state government had been consulted before the National Registration Department (NRD) issued the refugees their MyPR.

"If the Sabah state government was not consulted before the MyPR was issued to the refugees, then they cannot under the law be considered permanent residents in Sabah," said Tangau. "By law, they are permanent residents of Peninsular Malaysia and should move there."

cpps 9mp forum 240408 wilfred madius tangauThese are basic issues of law, added Tangau (left), "and cannot be swept under the carpet". He pointed out that the UN High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) had originally estimated an influx of 55,000 refugees into Sabah from the southern Philippines. This was in the early 1970s.

What Tangau cannot understand is how the figure could remain almost unchanged, according to the federal government, despite almost 40 years. The Upko leader wonders whether deaths and returns to southern Philippines have been taken into account in computing the figures. Also to be reckoned are children who have reached adulthood and could no longer be listed in the IMM13 documents of their parents.

Another issue for Upko is the estimated several hundred street children, presumed to be refugee children, in Sabah's towns. The party fears these children may not have been counted as IMM13 holders and could therefore be considered stateless. In that case, the real number of the refugee population in Sabah is reckoned to be several times more than the 84, 000 estimated by the Sabah state government.

The MyPR aside, the Upko secretary-general attributed the discrepancy in the IMM13 figures

to lacking security features in the document. The IMM13 document is just a yellow piece of paper which can be easily faked, according to Tangau. "The document does not have any security feature at all, unlike the MyKad."

"We find it surprising therefore that the chief minister could assure that there's no abuse in the issuance of the IMM13 documents," said Tangau. "There are suspicions based on arrests now and then that there is widespread forgery of the IMM13 documents."

He urged that the IMM13 be produced along the lines of the MyKad and MyPR and incorporate similar security features.

Also, the IMM13 holder must renew the permit every year but Upko believes that this is generally not being done. Evidently, this raises a question of the validity of such documents which are generally nothing more than tattered pieces of discoloured yellow paper in the possession of the holders.

Officially, the last state issuance of such documents was in 1984 by the Berjaya government under Chief Minister Harris Salleh.

Refugees in Sabah are in a curious situation since Malaysia is not a party to the International Convention on Refugees. Hence, all foreigners entering the state without valid travel papers are considered illegal immigrants. This should apply to the refugees as well except that they hold the IMM13 documents, unlike other illegal immigrants.

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