

**Facts shows Feds sidelining Sabah**  
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Glaring socio-economic inequalities between Sabah and the rest of Malaysia has former deputy chief minister Tham Nyip Shen pondering aloud:  
MCPX

Does the federal government still want Sabah as a part of Malaysia?.

This was the question he posed during a forum titled "Mid-term review of the Ninth Malaysia Plan open forum" in Kuala Lumpur today. The event was jointly organised by the Centre for Public Policy Studies and the Wawasan Open University.

Tham, who is currently the science and information technology advisor to the Sabah Chief Minister showed slides after slides of compiled official figures highlighting the vast disparities in many areas faced by Sabahans.

"In 1990, we had just as many living under the poverty line in Sabah as in Kelantan at 30 percent. Their figures had dropped to 10.3 percent in 2004 while ours were at 23 percent," he said.

Tham highlighted how Sabah consistently had the lowest literacy rate in the country.

He also pointed out that between 1995 and 2005, the number of teachers in partially government-aided schools had remained almost stagnant despite an increase in students.

Alarmingly, Sabah also had the lowest number of skilled health workers conducting deliveries of babies, he said.

Priorities wrong

Much of these problems are attributed to the fact that there are a large number of non-citizens in the state. According to figures obtained by the Statistics Department in 2005, 24.8 percent of Sabah's population consist of non-citizens.

"Why the federal government allow this to happen, I really don't know. Does the central government still want Sabah or not. Very soon, the non citizens will outnumber locals," he said.

Tham was one of two panelist during discussion on income inequality and distribution. The other speaker was Dr Ragayah Mat Zin from Institute of Malaysian and International Studies (Ikmas).

cpps 9mp forum 240408 wilfred madius tangauSimilarly, Upko secretary general and former Tuaran MP Wilfred Madius Tangau (left), during his presentation lamented that the federal government had wronged in their priorities in terms of development.

In his former constituency of Tuaran for example, Wilfred said there were more than 60 villages without electricity supply.

"I had to bring the relevant minister there (myself) before we could provide electricity for 20 villages," he said.

He added that at present, there were still 5,000km of gravel road in Sabah which ought to be upgraded in view of RM2 billion spent on a dedicated highway from Putrajaya to Kuala Lumpur.

"What was the rationale to build the highway from Putrajaya to Kuala Lumpur at the cost of RM2 billion? Where was the prioritisation?" he asked.

'Very unfair'

On the economy, Tham said 2004 figures showed that the Sabah was lagging in economic development as the Sabah GDP per capita was at RM4,868 or about half of the national average of RM9,746.

The figure was derived despite Sabah's consistent trade surplus and robust agricultural industries. Part of the problem, lamented Tham, was that Sabahans have to deal with higher commodity prices than in Peninsula Malaysia.

"Even a copy of a newspaper costs more for us," he said.

Tham believed that the main emphasis of the federal government was in Sabah's oil and gas reserves. However, he said the trickle down effect from the industry was not being felt on the ground.

"It is very unfair... I told the EPU (Economic Planning Unit) it is very silly to pipe the gas from Sabah to be processed in Sarawak for whatever reasons.

"I hope that such decisions are eventually changed. Sabah and Sarawak are very rich in oil and gas. Unfortunately, the federal government takes the money and never put it back into these states," he said.

In closing, both Tham and Wilfred hoped that the federal government would pay more attention to Sabah's needs in the future in view of the recent change in political climate.