

Sapp lauds Najib but seeks 'comprehensive solution'

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Sabah Progressive Party (Sapp) in welcoming Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak's announcement of 'a massive operation' to flush out illegal immigrants in Sabah, reiterated that nothing less than "a comprehensive approach" is needed to effectively address the problem.

MCPX

"Security, law and order are basic constitutional duties of the government," Sapp president Yong Teck Lee said in a statement emailed to Malaysiakini today.

sapp sabah meeting 200608 04 "The rakyat should not have to suffer while waiting for the government to take its time in tackling crimes, illicit drugs, street kids, illegal cigarette vendors and a host of other problems associated with illegal immigrants," he stressed.

Yong pointed out that Chief Minister Musa Aman and Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar had earlier said Manila was reluctant to accept back its deported citizens.

Given this, the 'massive operation' may result in extreme overcrowding of the state's detention centres, he warned.

"I recall that in October 2006, then home affairs minister Radzi (Sheikh Ahmad) had declared the existing 15 detention centres in the country had already reached 'crisis point'," he lamented, adding that given nothing has been done since, the situation would be worse.

The mother of all treats

Yong said the party is proposing to both federal and state governments to at least consider its 14-point proposals on the illegal immigrants issue submitted time and again to the prime minister and the authorities over the last two years.

"We also stand by our memorandum 'Illegal immigrants - Mother of all threats' presented to the then DPM (who is now PM) in August 1999."

illegal immigrants roundup 010305 patiently waiting Yong's Sapp - a component party of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition - has last week stunned the nation when it resolved to back a motion of no confidence against Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

To sum up, the Sapp chief said, the range of measures that the government must take without delay is to detain illegal outsourcing agents such as 'snake heads' and other local syndicates which smuggle in illegal immigrants.

He said there is a need to boost resources of the police in terms of manpower, equipment, transport, navy boats, air patrols and massive funding.

"Sapp is still waiting for a simple answer why the Malaysian consulate cannot be relocated from Davao to Zamboanga (in Mindanao)," Yong said.

He added that since the Philippines is reluctant to take back its citizens, Malaysia must use its "superior" international position in Asean and Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to get Manila to cooperate in solving this human misery affecting its citizens.

The steps that can be taken include the setting up of a Philippine consulate in Sabah, tighter control over the Zamboanga-Sandakan ferry services, and the imposition of a bond on return tickets for non-Malaysian travelers.

More holistic, long-term solutions needed

It is understood that the United States spends US\$200 million (RM620 million) per year in the southern Philippines in socio-economic aid as part of their (American) national security efforts to tackle the breeding ground for potential terrorists.

"What is the role of Malaysia, Asean and OIC in all these 'win-win, smart partnership' programmes?" he asked.

immigrant workers 280205 moving out"Without having these regional perspectives on the illegal immigrant problems, any enforcement, however massive, amounts to no more than superficial, simplistic approach that will only stretch our national resources, cram up the detention centres and promise no long-term solution," Yong said.

He argued that economic opportunities in Sabah provide the 'pull' factor which attracts illegal immigrants from southern Philippines and Indonesia while the 'push' factor that drives Filipinos to Sabah is political and economics, while for Indonesians it is mostly a matter of livelihood.

According to Yong, a holistic approach is therefore needed to deal with Sabah's illegal immigrant problems which include addressing issues of development and poverty in neighbouring countries.

The Philippines' territorial claim over Sabah, for example, cannot be brushed aside although it is not recognised by Malaysia, said the former chief minister.

He added that the breakdown of the peace process in southern Philippines and the friction between the different factions pursuing autonomy in Muslim Mindanao are issues that are intricately linked to the immigration of Filipinos into Sabah.

"Sapp thanks DPM Najib for the announcement and looks forward to a more holistic, long-term and effective solutions to this mother of all threats that has been a nightmare for the people of Malaysia," the Sapp chief said.