

**Ambiga seeks RCI into citizenship-for-votes claims**  
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**By Melissa Chi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 12 — Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan today pushed for the establishment of a royal panel to investigate claims the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) has been fast-tracking citizenship applications for foreigners in return for their votes.

The prominent lawyer and civil rights activist noted the federal government has been plagued by such claims recently and that the allegations persist despite repeated denials by its officials.

“I’m sorry but to me that’s the highest treason to this country, that we are registering foreigners as citizens for the purposes of voting,” the prominent civil rights activist told a bipartisan parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform.

“If that is the case and if there is evidence, then we must have a Royal Commission to examine this,” she proposed to the nine-man panel on Day Two of its public hearing.

A unit of the Bangladesh Prime Minister’s Office had allegedly posted on its official website last September 17 that its citizens who are working in Malaysia had been asked to vote for the ruling BN coalition in exchange for fast-tracked citizenship requests.

The allegation triggered a public uproar prompting an Opposition MP to moot the setting up of a Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) into the issue.

Both Putrajaya and Dhaka — the latter through its High Commission here — have denied the claims.

The controversial webpage has since disappeared from the Bangladesh NGO Affairs’ Bureau’s official website.

Today, PSC chairman Datuk Seri Maximus Ongkili asked Ambiga to prove her claims.

But she said it was difficult to get evidence because those who were given citizenship will not come forward.

“Which is precisely why you need a Royal Commission hauling up all the people who are involved and asking them to explain.

“Let me tell you, what we should be doing is looking at all those who have been registered or naturalised in the last five years and that list should be disclosed in Parliament,” she replied.

The former Bar Council president also said that there are citizens with the identity card (IC) code 71, which means their country of origin is not known.

“We shouldn’t have a system like that. ‘71’ shouldn’t exist. It also fuels the suspicion that we have many foreigners who are being naturalised,” she said.

National Registration Department (NRD) Director-General Datin Jariah Mohd Said explained that prior to 2001, foreigners as well as Malaysians born outside the country were given the "71" code on their IC. But since then, Malaysians born abroad as well as foreigners have been allocated the code according to the country of birth.

Ambiga added that some IC-holders with the "71" code did not have their addresses recorded in the Election Commission's (EC) database.

Rasah MP Anthony Loke pointed out that in 2010, 15,288 new citizenships were granted.

Out of those, 5,631 were Malaysians born here who did not have documentation in the past. The largest group were Indonesians, with a total of 6,648 cases.

Ambiga also pointed out that Bersih 2.0 had discovered about 40 cases in military camps in Rasah, Segamat and Senawang where the wives of military personnel were registered as voters under their husband's IC number.

"You mean the wives are using their husband's IC?" Ongkili asked, stunned.

"Yes, that's right," Ambiga said.

The minister said immediate steps needed to be taken to rectify the situation.

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