

**Pointless, Dr M says of Sabah RCI**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
**August 10, 2012**  
**By Mohd Farhan Darwis**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 10 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today he disagreed with Datuk Seri Najib Razak's decision to set up a Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) into Sabah's illegal immigrant problem, pointing out that such a panel would bring no solutions and instead complicate matters.

His latest remarks come even as the prime minister prepares to announce the terms of reference for the RCI tomorrow in Sabah, in what is seen as a bid to head off the potential for a revolt in the east Malaysian state over the illegal immigrants issue, after two Barisan Nasional (BN) lawmakers quit recently citing the federal government's lack of resolve in solving the surge in the number of foreigners in the state.

"The RCI will not deliver any result that will solve the problems. When there is an RCI it will bring about other matters," the former prime minister told reporters today.

Some opposition politicians have blamed Dr Mahathir for the growth of illegal immigrant numbers in Sabah, pointing to the fact that the state saw a huge increase in population during his time as the prime minister.

But Dr Mahathir, who was premier from 1981 until 2003, sought to justify the increase in Sabah's population in the latest posting on his blog earlier this week.

Earlier this week, he defended the increase in the number of migrants in Sabah, pointing out that they qualified to be citizens because they have been staying in Malaysia for decades and spoke Bahasa Malaysia.

"I have been accused of apparently bringing them (illegal immigrants) in ... We don't have to do that because they came on their own.

"Previously they have been coming and going. They are not alien to Sabah; they have been going back and forth between Sabah and the Philippines. Maybe they feel Sabah is safer and that is why they stay there," said Dr Mahathir today.

He highlighted that, while he was PM, he had directed the authorities to repatriate the foreigners but it was a pointless exercise because they kept returning.

Yesterday a Sabah-based Barisan Nasional (BN) party condemned Dr Mahathir for his "insensitive" defence of Sabah's increasing migrant population, an emotive issue that will likely be central to the pact's campaign for the state in the coming polls.

The United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation (UPKO) said in a statement in Kota Kinabalu that Dr Mahathir, whom the opposition has blamed for Sabah's unchecked population increase, had confused the state's illegal immigrants with its legal migrants.

Najib had announced the highly-anticipated RCI on Sabah's illegals issue on June 1 but stopped short of revealing details of the panel's composition and terms of reference.

The issue has been bandied about in the media for nearly six months since February 10 when Sabah BN leader Tan Sri Bernard Dompok's first announced Cabinet's decision to form the RCI.

The unchecked influx of illegal immigrants in Sabah has been a longstanding problem in the BN-ruled state, and frequently blamed for the rise in social, economic and security problems suffered by the locals here.

According to replies provided in Parliament last year, Sabah's populace numbered 651,304 in 1970 and grew to 929,299 a decade later. But in the two decades following 1980, the state's population rose significantly by a staggering 1.5 million people, reaching 2,468,246 by 2000.

Media reports said that as of 2010, this number has grown further to 3.12 million, with foreigners making up a sizeable 27 per cent or 889,799 of the population.

Opposition leaders have long raged against the BN government for this population explosion, alleging that illegals have been allowed into the east Malaysian state, and given MyKads and voting rights to help the ruling coalition cling to power.

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