

Six months enough to solve migrant problem, say Sabah BN parties
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KOTA KINABALU, Aug 11 — Sabah Barisan Nasional (BN) parties are satisfied with the scope and duration of the Royal Commission of Inquiry's (RCI) investigation on illegal immigrants here, saying it would sufficiently address the state's decades-old problem.

Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) president Tan Sri Joseph Pairin Kitingan said his party was "grateful" and confident of the government's sincerity in implementing the panel's recommendations once its probe is complete.

"We are very happy indeed with the RCI, the terms and the appointments. We are very grateful.

"Now, we come to the second state - the implementation. And I do believe that the government will do its level best to carry out the responsibilities and objectives of the RCI," he said after a press conference with Datuk Seri Najib Razak at the Sabah Umno headquarters here.

Pairin (picture) added that with the RCI established, any support that BN lost when two senior federal lawmakers left the pact last month would likely be recaptured.

He pointed out that the RCI was a longstanding demand from Sabahans themselves and its formation was a step in the right direction for BN.

"Indeed this is what we have all been waiting for. We believe this is something everyone must be supportive of because after all, it came from them- they wished it, they wanted it and now, they have it," he said.

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) president Datuk V. K. Liew agreed, saying the RCI's terms were "comprehensive" and covers all concerns raised by Sabahans over the state's illegals issue.

"The prime minister has listened to the voice of Sabahans," he said.

Both Pairin and Liew disagreed that the panel's six-month term was insufficient to resolve the nearly four-decade-old issue, pointing out that members could still apply for an extension if they needed to.

Earlier today, the prime minister announced the terms of reference for the RCI, which will focus on investigating claims that foreigners in Sabah have been unlawfully awarded blue ICs and citizenships and registered in the state's electoral roll.

The panel will also probe study the reason behind Sabah's growing populace, which saw a 390 per cent spike from 1970 to 2010 to hit its current 3.12 million mark, significantly higher than the national population growth of 164 per cent.

But notably missing from the panel's eight terms is a probe to identify the culprit behind the alleged award of Malaysian ICs or citizenships to foreigners, a point that the opposition will likely criticise.

Opposition politicians have often accused the federal government of awarding citizenships and voting rights to foreigners in Sabah in order to stay in power.

The "citizenships-for-votes" claim has cast a spotlight on Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, as it was during his rule from 1981 to 2003 when Sabah's population experienced a significant increase.

In the days following today's RCI terms announcement by Najib, Dr Mahathir has been issuing negative remarks on the purpose of the panel and its objectives, which his critics have taken to mean that the former prime minister feared his alleged role in distributing ICs would be revealed.

Dr Mahathir has been accused of spearheading "Projek IC" or "Projek M", an initiative to award citizenships and IC cards to foreigners in exchange for votes.

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