

Anwar: Sabah RCI tailored to protect 'citizenship-for-votes' culprits
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By Clara Chooi

KOTA MARUDU, Aug 12 – Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim suggested today that the government had deliberately refused to have the Sabah Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) probe those responsible for the alleged “citizenships-for-votes” deal with foreigners in order to protect certain personalities.

The opposition leader (picture) said the entire RCI was flawed as its terms were lacking details and do not include identifying those responsible or recommending punishment on them.

“These are major criminal acts, particularly when it involves corruption and cheating and falsifying documents... these are serious flaws, but of course, these are not part of the RCI’s terms of reference,” he told reporters after a function announcing the crossover of another senior Barisan Nasional (BN) here.

The newly-established RCI on Sabah’s illegal immigrants has been tasked to investigate if foreigners in the state have been unlawfully awarded Malaysian ICs or citizenships and included in the electoral roll.

But the panel’s terms, announced in Kota Kinabalu yesterday by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, do not include a probe to identify those involved in handing out citizenships unlawfully.

The opposition have often laid blame on former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for the state’s extraordinary spike in migrant population, claiming he had spearheaded “Project IC” or “Projek M”.

The “Projek IC” initiative was purportedly kicked off in the early 1980s during Dr Mahathir’s tenure to give out Malaysian ICs to illegal immigrants in Sabah, in order to help the ruling BN stay in power.

“Yes, it seems Dr Mahathir is clearly nervous about the RCI,” Anwar said here.

“But they (BN) must have given their assurance that they will not pick at who is at fault, who are the people taking money or falsifying documents and why... so that means the entire RCI is just flawed,” he said.

Anwar added that Sabah voters were likely to have little regard for the RCI, noting the government’s years of refusal to set up the panel.

He pointed out that the decades-old problem could not be so easily resolved within the six months deadline given to the panel to make its recommendations to the government.

The PKR de facto leader suggested that the RCI was merely a political ploy, referring to its formation so close to the coming polls, and added that like the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on electoral reforms, the panel was unlikely to solve Sabah’s problem with illegal immigrants.

"This is just like a gimmick. They (the government) are not serious. I believe most Sabahans would not have any regard for this RCI because they have learned from the past on how their request to form the panel was not heeded," he said.

Najib's announcement on the RCI's reference terms yesterday comes just two weeks after the twin exits of two senior Sabah BN lawmakers – Tuaran MP Datuk Seri Wilfred Mojilip Bumburing and Beaufort MP Datuk Seri Lajim Ukin.

Both men cited their dissatisfaction with the government's delay on the RCI, which the Cabinet had already agreed to form on February 8 this year.

In Sabah, the problem of illegal immigrants has been dominating every election since 1970 as the local natives believe that foreigners are to blame for the state's economic, social and security problems.

Some 27 per cent of Sabah's 3.12 million population are said to be foreigners.

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