

All-inclusive terms for inquiry

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SABAH ILLEGALS ISSUE: Former chief judge Shim has 6 months to prepare report

KOTA KINABALU: NO stone will be left unturned when the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) to investigate the illegal immigrant problem in Sabah begins its tedious task soon.

All concerns raised by Sabah leaders to address the problem, which has plagued the state for decades, are covered under the comprehensive terms of reference (ToR) for the RCI announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak here yesterday.

At the top of RCI's eight-point ToR is to investigate the total population of illegal immigrants in Sabah issued with blue identity cards or citizenship.

The five-member committee is chaired by former Sabah and Sarawak High Court chief judge Tan Sri Steve Shim Lip Kiong, a Sarawakian, while the rest are experienced Sabahans, Datuk Seri Dr Kamaruzaman Ampon (former Universiti Malaysia Sabah vice-chancellor), Tan Sri Herman Luping (former Sabah attorney-general), Datuk Henry Chin Poy-Wu (former Kuala Lumpur police chief) and Datuk K.Y. Mustafa (former Sabah state secretary).

Najib had announced the highly-anticipated RCI on June 1 following fresh requests from state BN component parties who feared a backlash from voters in the coming general election if nothing was done to address the issue of illegals.

Revealing the ToR after meeting state BN component party leaders, Najib said the RCI would investigate whether the issuance of blue identity cards and citizenship to the illegal immigrants had been in accordance with the law.

The other key ToR for the RCI was to investigate whether illegal immigrants, holding identity cards and temporary receipts for identity cards or had been granted citizenship without complying with the law, were registered as voters.

Najib said the RCI would also investigate whether the relevant authorities took appropriate action to plug any loopholes in the standard operating procedure in the issuance of Malaysian identity cards and citizenship.

The all-encompassing ToR also cover an investigation into the rapid increase in Sabah's population by determining the number of Sabahans, foreign workers and their dependents, illegal immigrants and their dependents, and refugees.

Najib said the RCI would also investigate the social implications for the state arising from the issuance of identity cards and citizenship to illegal immigrants and to probe the number of illegal immigrants given blue identity cards or citizenship on the basis that they are stateless.

The influx of illegal immigrants has been a longstanding problem in Sabah and frequently blamed for the social, economic and security problems in the state.

According to figures made available in Parliament last year, Sabah's population in 1970 was 651,304 and grew to 929,299 a decade later. 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.

It was estimated that as of 2010, this number had grown further to 3.12 million, with foreigners allegedly making up a sizeable 27 per cent or 889,799 of the population.

The RCI was given six months to complete the investigation and to compile a report to be presented to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

"The government hopes that the people of Sabah will benefit from the setting up of the RCI and together support the government in the effort to identify the best strategy and approach to deal with all issues related to the problem," said Najib.

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