

Government the main culprit behind illegal immigrants problem, former senator tells RCI

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Former senator and state assemblyman Dr Chong Eng Leong has blamed the influx of illegal immigrants in Sabah on the Federal government.

He told that Royal Commission of Inquiry on illegal immigrants in Sabah that the Federal government was the main culprit because of the role it played in indiscriminately issuing identity cards to thousands of illegal immigrants.

"Because of this, local traders, businessmen and private companies have no qualms about hiring illegal immigrants as workers. How can we blame them when they see the actions of the Federal government and follow suit?" he told the five-man RCI panel led by former Sabah and Sarawak Chief Justice Tan Sri Steve Shim Lip Kiong.

RCI conducting officer Jamil Aripin had asked Dr Chong whether the influx of illegal immigrants into Sabah was the result of local traders, businessmen and private companies hiring these immigrants.

Dr Chong argued that just because these parties had committed wrongs, it didn't make the actions of the Federal government right. He said the Federal government was the role model from which Malaysians took the cue from.

"Who started this mess of indiscriminately issuing identity cards to illegal immigrants in the first place? Who encouraged it? It is certainly not the local traders or the businessmen or the private companies.

"The first step to solve this issue is for the Federal government to stop denying its previous actions and own up to its mistakes. I am not looking for anyone to hang, I believe in reconciliation, I want all parties to sit down and discuss how to resolve the issue."

"The Federal government has wronged the Federal Constitution and the people of Sabah. It is time to stop living in denial and own up to the mistakes that have been made down the years," Dr Chong said, adding that official statistics by government agencies also didn't make sense.

In the 1960s, the official population of Sarawak was one million while the Sabah had a population of 600,000. But between 1970s and 2000s, the Kadazandusun Murut population increased by 160 per cent, Bajau by 340 per cent and Malays by 1,552 per cent.

Armed with the figures obtained from the Department of Statistics, Dr Chong questioned the logic behind the surge in Malays in Sabah compared with the native people.

He also rubbished two reasons given by senior government figures.

Dr Chong said in 2006 Home Ministry parliamentary secretary Datuk Paduka Abdul Rahman Ibrahim said in Parliament that more than 700,000 late birth registrations were issued, out of which 523,785 of those were born before 1971.

"The reason given by Abdul Rahman was that many of these late birth registrations were because many of the births had occurred in the interior of Sabah, which was inaccessible to hospitals and government agencies."

Dr Chong said his point of contention was, why was the majority of the late birth certificates issued to Malays when the people who populated the interior of Sabah were natives. He said this was a confusing and contradictory statement.

He cited former National Registration Department director Datuk Abdul Rauf Sani who had earlier told the RCI that he had issued more than 200,000 late birth certificates without going through the magistrate's court, as was the proper procedure.

Abdul Rauf had served as the Sabah NRD director between 1990 and 1992. In 1996, he was detained under the Internal Security Act 1960 for two months for his involvement in issuing thousands of identity documents to foreigners. – July 18, 2013.

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