

**A haunted voice on what was and what could have been in Sabah**  
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Oh, he was just a young man when his home state of Sabah became part of Malaysia. But turning 75 at the end of this month, he still remembers every pin-sized detail well.

Small wonder then that the words of Tan Sri Simon Sipaun have that haunted tone of what could have been.

He has seen the very land of his fathers slip from under his feet to the sole of the immigrant. Sabah is flooded with illegals, who have made him a tourist in his own home.

"This change is permanent," he says during a telephone interview. They have reshaped Sabah's entire economic, socio-political and cultural landscape.

"Our rights have been slowly eroded over the years," says the former Sabah state secretary who retired 10 years ago after 32 years in service.

Sipaun says he would have no reason to be angry if Malaysia was governed, administered well and inside the mothership, his own home state.

He cites the 2010 World Bank and UNDP data to show that Sabah is the poorest state in the country in terms of per capita income although rich in natural resources.

"Employment opportunities are limited and thousands of youths had to leave for other places to earn a living," he adds.

Sipaun says gas was found in Sabah and yet it had to be transported through a gas pipeline 512km-long and costing billions of ringgit.

"Common sense and conventional business wisdom will tell you that the processing plant should be located near the source of raw material," he adds.

He notes there were no major industries apart from large plantations owned by individuals and government-linked companies.

"We also lack infrastructure facilities like roads, water, and electricity compared to the peninsular," he says.

He compares Sabah to Singapore, which was expelled from the Federation in 1965 and Brunei, which was part of the Malaysia vision but opted out.

"The island-republic is economically advanced compared to Malaysia as a whole. Brunei citizens need not pay income tax in the oil and gas rich tiny sultanate," he notes.

He likens both of these tiny states as "small fish in a big pond while Sabah in Malaysia as "a big fish in a small pond". He cites for example how the national anthem of Malaya remained, while only additional stripes were added to the Malaysia flag.

"These are cosmetic changes for a new federation."

He also notes that Putrajaya took 46 years to recognise Malaysia Day when it declared September 16 as a public holiday from 2010.

He notes that unlike in Singapore, no referendum was conducted in North Borneo (now Sabah and Labuan) and Sarawak to obtain the views of the people on the formation of Malaysia.

"As a citizen of Sabah, I had no objection to the state to be part of Malaysia although I think we were rushed into it."

He also says Malay Supremacy (Ketuanan Melayu) should be abandoned as this was a political system akin to the Apartheid System of South Africa, which eventually failed to survive.

"Such ideology was unheard of in North Borneo before it became part of Malaysia," Sipaun notes. – September 10, 2013.

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