

Sabah RCI ends, now comes the hard part, says commission chairman
Malaysian Insider
Sept 20 , 2013
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After hearing testimonies from 211 witnesses in just over a year, the Royal Commission of Inquiry on illegal immigrants in Sabah was left with plenty to ponder as proceedings came to an end at the Kota Kinabalu High Court today.

A key point which clearly stood out was the fact that illegal immigrants in Sabah had been issued Malaysian identity cards indiscriminately.

Another fact was none of the witnesses could offer a solution on how to solve the mess created.

Witnesses such as former Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Yong Teck Lee, former senator Dr Chong Eng Leong, former Internal Security Act detainee Datuk Dr Jeffrey Gapari Kitingan and former Sandakan district chief officer Hassnar Ebrahim told the RCI how illegal immigrants were issued identity cards and registered on the electoral roll.

One of the RCI's main witnesses, Mutalib Mohd Daud, the former Silam Umno division executive secretary, died two days before he was supposed to testify in June this year.

Mutalib had written a number of books exposing accounts of ICs being issued to foreigners, which were codenamed Project IC or Project M, the M standing for Mahathir, the name of the country's former prime minister.

National Registration Department director-general Datuk Jariah Mohd Said told the five-man RCI panel that there were 113,000 "problematic" identity cardholders in Sabah.

Amid all the testimonies, the name of former deputy home minister Tan Sri Megat Junid Megat Ayub and former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad frequently cropped up.

Last week, Dr Mahathir appeared before the panel and denied any knowledge of Project IC.

Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim later testified it was impossible that Dr Mahathir did not know about Project IC as such a large-scale operation could not have been carried out without the approval of the executive, especially as Dr Mahathir was also Home Minister in the 1980s and 1990s.

Illegal immigrants who had been issued Malaysian identity cards told the panel how they received their documents in coffee shops and villages, instead of collecting it from the NRD.

When many of the witnesses were asked about solutions on how to tackle the issue of illegal immigrants who are already holding Malaysian identity cards, they said it was going to be difficult as many of them have been staying in Sabah for decades.

Jariah recommended an amnesty for these immigrants while Dr Chong was adamant that all of them should be deported.

RCI panel chairman Tan Sri Steve Shim Lip Kiong, in announcing the closing of oral

proceedings today, declared that the hard work would start now as the commission members sift through the various exhibits and documents which had been tendered during the year-long inquiry.

Shim, the former Sabah and Sarawak Chief Justice, said the three-month extension for the RCI was to give the commissioners time to hold brainstorming sessions, which will include collecting input from RCI consulting officers and representatives from the Sabah Law Association.

The RCI began on September 21, 2012 and covered eight terms of reference including investigating the number of foreigners issued Malaysian identity cards, whether the issuance was in accordance with the law, whether they had been registered in the Sabah electoral roll and the social implications of these foreigners in Sabah.

The RCI panel commissioners were Shim, former Sabah Attorney-General Herman J. Luping, University Malaysia Sabah vice-chancellor Kamaruzaman Ampon, former Sabah state secretary K.Y. Mustafa and Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation deputy chairman Henry Chin Poy Wu. - September 20, 2013.

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