

Harris wants Surat Akaun recognised, says foreigners needed for economy

Another signature drive?

KOTA KINABALU: Yayasan Islam Sabah (YIS) may organise a signature campaign calling on the Federal Government to make a firm stand on issues relating to identity cards (MyKads) and illegal immigrants.

Foundation President and former Chief Minister Datuk Harris Mohd Salleh said the Federal Government had not taken a serious and consistent stance, as well as steps to correct the prevailing "misperception by the people" on both cases.

"It is important for the Federal Government to resolve and settle them once and for all by coming up clean and telling the truth regarding the policies and practices behind the issuance of identity cards and the handling of illegal immigrants," he said in a statement.

The campaign is the second being proposed, after the Consumers Association of Sabah/Labuan (Cash) plan to petition the Federal Government to take a serious view of issues relating to illegal immigrants in Sabah.

However, while the Cash objective, among others, is to find a way to recall the genuine Mykads in the hands of the illegals, the one being initiated by

Harris seeks to make the Federal Government acknowledge as valid, the *Surat Akaun* (statutory declarations) used to facilitate the obtaining of documents by foreigners.

Harris, who was Sabah Chief Minister from 1976 to 1985, said that if checks were to be carried out, they must also include those and everybody in possession of late registration birth certificates, especially those in the Interior.

He pointed out that the issuance of ICs were based on *surat akaun* and late registration birth certificates "that had been an accepted federal document since 40 years ago".

According to him, most IC holders are genuine Malaysian citizens who are in possession of the *surat akaun* and late registration birth certificates, particularly those coming from the rural areas.

"Thus, the validity of these ICs should not be questioned," he said.

Undoubtedly, the relevant government enforce-

ment agencies should have been aware that the colonial and Malaysian governments had allowed the migration of people from the Malay Archipelago freely without any travel documents, particularly to Sabah.

He pointed out that the Malaysian Government only issued ICs to almost everybody in Sabah in 1966, with a substantial number of people having obtained them on the strength of the *surat akaun*, thereby entitling them the status of citizenship in accordance with the Federal Constitution "if they had been residing in the country for more than 10 years".

In this respect, Harris regretted that certain government agencies had been questioning the people of their racial background, frowning on their "foreign" ethnicity, particularly Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Filipino and Indonesian, raising doubts on their possession of Malaysian ICs.

"Sabah is in reality not only a multiracial, but also multiethnic state comprising various races like the

Malays, Chinese, Indians and Pakistanis.

"They had migrated from time immemorial, beginning during the colonial days and continuing even after the formation of Malaysia. The origin of Chinese, Indians and Pakistanis speaks for itself," he said.

He also noted that the colonial government brought in large numbers of migrants to Sabah, especially from Indonesia, Philippines, Indochina, India, Pakistan and Hong Kong, for specific tasks.

According to him, the Indians and Pakistanis were enlisted into the police force, especially to fight the rebellion led by Mat Salleh, while others were employed as rubber plantation and construction workers, particularly after the end of the Second World War.

Furthermore, thousands poured in monthly without any travel document.

Harris said more than 50 per cent of the people in Sabah were without any formal papers such as birth certificates when the Federal Government imposed the issuance of identity cards in 1966, and hence the necessity for a *surat akaun*.

See Page 2, Col. 2

■ Abolish levy and Task Force: Page 7

Issues stemmed from own policies: Harris

From Page One

On another note, he said the uncertainties and dissatisfaction on issues relating to illegal immigrants stemmed from the Federal Government's own policies, particularly in the appointment of agencies given the monopoly in handling specific issues, such as medical examinations and work permits.

"The tendency for plantations which include those owned by government agencies or government-linked companies to employ illegal immigrants, even though through contractors, must be squarely attributed to the unfair and unreasonable policies, including the levy imposed on foreign workers. Plantations or employers find it difficult to obtain work permits these days," he said.

Citing an example, Harris pointed out that an employer seeking 50 workers would only be issued permits for 20-30 workers.

"Surely, employers in the first place will not employ foreigners, especially illegals, if they can find locals, and secondly, it will be financially imprudent and senseless for them to employ more than necessary.

"Furthermore, whatever the rules and policies are, they must be applied to the whole country, rather than applied on a discriminatory basis to Sabah."

Another issue that merits examination and serious consideration is whether immigrants are really needed by Sabah for its economic activities, he said.

If they are, then the large scale deportation of illegal immigrants would not solve Sabah's labour shortage problems, he claimed.

He also regretted that the Federal Government had not been attending to solving the people's problems.

"Many cases of applications for Permanent Residence or citizenship by Sabahns either for their children or spouses who were born outside Malaysia were not entertained. A majority have been left outstanding for more than 10 years, with no decision in sight," he said.

In this respect, Harris called on the Federal Government to consider abolishing all agencies having monopolies on related issues; change its regulations and policies; abolish the Special Task Force on illegal immigrants and scrap the levy on foreign workers, saying "Malaysia needs them".

The Government should also allow employers to deal directly with the Immigration Department, and legalise the illegal workers if they are needed, and as recommended by the representative of the UN High Commission for Refugees in Kuala Lumpur, he said.



Harris