

Headline	Berjaya govt let 73,000 refugees into Sabah		
MediaTitle	New Sabah Times English (KK)		
Date	15 Jan 2013	Language	English
Circulation	23,655	Readership	
Section	Home	Color	Full Color
Page No	1	ArticleSize	655 cm ²
AdValue	RM 3,174	PR Value	RM 9,523



Berjaya govt let 73,000 refugees into Sabah

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KOTA KINABALU: Former head of the Resettlement Unit in the Chief Minister's Department told the five-member Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) panel that a total of 73,000 Filipino refugees from the Southern Philippines were registered by the Unit from 1976 to 1985.

Abdul Jaapar Alip, 58, who was later transferred to the State Water Department before retiring two years ago said, the Unit, formerly known as Resettlement Division, was set up in 1976 to deal with the Filipinos refugees in Sabah.

The refugees were relocated in five resettlement schemes gazetted by the State Government in Telipok, Kinarut, Kampung Bahagia Sandakan, Kampung Selamat Semporna and Kampung Hidayat Tawau, explained Jaapar when questioned by conducting officer Deputy Public Prosecutor Manaf Kurup, who was assisted by Dato' Azmi Afiffin and Jamil Aripin.

The RCI panel is chaired by former Chief Judge of Sabah and Sarawak Tan Sri Steve Shim Lip Kiong.

Other members of the panel are former vice chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Sabah Prof Datuk Dr Kamaruzaman Ampon, former Sabah state secretary Datuk KY Mustafa, former State Attorney-General Tan Sri Herman Luping and Malaysian Crime Prevention Foundation Deputy Chairman Datuk Henry Chin.

Jaapar was the third witness to give his testimony yesterday during the first day of the hearing held at the Federal Court, Kota Kinabalu High Court Complex here. The RCI hearing will go on until Friday and resume from Jan 28 to Feb 1, and from Feb 22 to 27.

To determine that the Filipinos are refugees, Jaapar said trained personnel from the Resettlement Unit would interview the immigrants and they must fulfill five conditions, namely they must have come from Region 9 (Southern Philippines), have been directly affected by the unrest there, have arrived in Sabah between 1972 and 1984, and they must be Muslims and are willing to stay permanently in Sabah.

Subsequently, the Unit would process their

applications and submit them to the Immigration Department for approval to enable the IMM13 social work pass to be issued.

In the meantime, the refugees would also be given an acknowledgement registration receipt to enable them to claim the IMM13 social work pass and get a resettlement identification card from the Unit's office, he said.

However, Jaapar said that the resettlement identification card was not recognised by the National Registration Department.

On the reference made by the Chief Minister's Department between a refugee and a displaced person, he said the same conditions apply except that a displaced person need not necessarily have to be a Muslim.

After September 1985, the State government under the rule of Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) had ordered that the registration exercise to be ceased.

Later, another exercise was carried out to register the transient immigrants in 1987 and it was jointly conducted by the Resettlement Unit and the Institute for Development Studies (Sabah) to record the undocumented immigrants.

Through the exercise, 325,000 illegal immigrants were registered of which 9,000 were found to have entered Sabah before 1984, and qualified to be accorded the refugee status, he said.

Earlier, the second witness, Prof Emeritus Dr Ranjit Singh of Universiti Utara Malaysia told the panel that when the British North Borneo Chartered Company was established in 1881, the first governor started a special scheme to bring in Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong and Shanghai to meet the labour shortage in the plantation sector.

The British conducted the first population census in 1891 but it was not a thorough one because the company did not have enough officers. Furthermore at that time the company still did not occupy the whole of Sabah until 1902, he said.

The first census had estimated that the then North Borneo had a total of 67,000 people of

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which 34,000 were Kadazandusun; Murut (not available), Bajau (11,000), Brunei Malay (3,500); Suluk (3,700); Orang Sungai (not known), other indigenous (6,000) and Chinese (7,000), said Dr Ranjit who specializes in the history of Brunei and Sabah.

The next census was carried out in 1970 and showed that Sabah had a total of 651,000 people of which 183,000 were Kadazandusun; Murut (30,000), Bajau (77,000); Brunei Malay (28,000); Suluk (10,000); Orang Sungai (17,000); other indigenous (57,000) and Chinese (138,000).

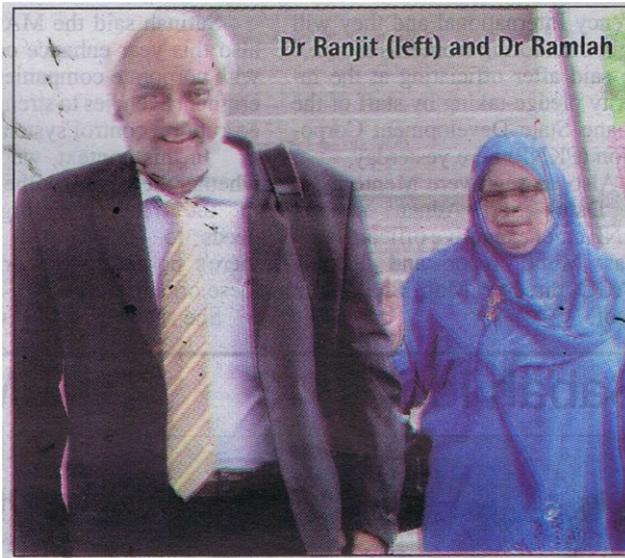
“Then the picture changed very drastically in

1991, where Sabah’s populations had increased to 1.7 million people, and out of that figure, 423,000 were registered as non-citizens. So demographically the movement had changed not due to natural increase. Who are these non-citizens? The census did not reveal,” said Dr Ranjit.

Meanwhile the first witness, Prof Datin Paduka Dr Ramlah Adam, social science lecturer attached to Universiti Utara Malaysia Kedah, said the illegal immigrants issue should be tackled based on humanitarian and not political ground.

The hearing continues at 8.30am today.

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People making their way out of the court building calmly upon being informed of the bomb scare on Monday.