

Paying heavy price for the water villages

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KOTA KINABALU: An academician blamed the uncontrolled existence of water villages for setting the stage for chronic problems like the open sale of Syabu and the Lahad Datu intrusion by Filipino militants that claimed 72 lives happening in the State.

He said these villages in Sabah are dangerous settlements that house illegal immigrants and pose security threats, besides being a hub of social ills and illegal activities.

Universiti Malaysia Sabah's School of Social Science senior lecturer, Wan Shawaluddin bin Wan Hassan, said this when testifying as the 118th witness at the hearing of Royal

AT THE RCI HEARING

Commission of Inquiry (RCI) on illegal immigrants, Tuesday.

He said these villages become a main attraction for the illegals to come and stay together with locals in those areas.

"I visited many water villages in Sabah like Pulau Gaya, here, and a number in the East Coast like Kg Ice Box in Tawau and Kg Puyut in Lahad Datu, among others.

"Hence, I had the opportunity to see with my own eyes how unhealthy activities are happening as if the situation is normal like selling syabu openly and without regard for the enforce-

ment authorities.

"Also, I have seen how rampant is the use of counterfeit money in these villages especially in Lahad Datu. A coffee shop owner there showed me a fake RM50 note," he said.

Wan Shawaluddin said the study also showed that smuggling of firearms is happening in the water villages and the police had clarified that such illegal activity is not uncommon.

He said he had published a book together with another UMS lecturer Ramli Dollah based on research on the issue entitled "*Pendatang Asing dan Isu Keselamatan di Sabah*".

"The presence of illegal immigrants and foreigners in water villages has created a stigma among society as the public would negatively perceive these as unsafe places to be like a black area. Not all water villages can be generalised like that.

"If this problem is not fully addressed, this situation can be out of control...like what happened in the 911 tragic incident in New York which was very unexpected and the Lahad Datu intrusion by the Sulu-armed terrorists several months ago.

"These happened because these

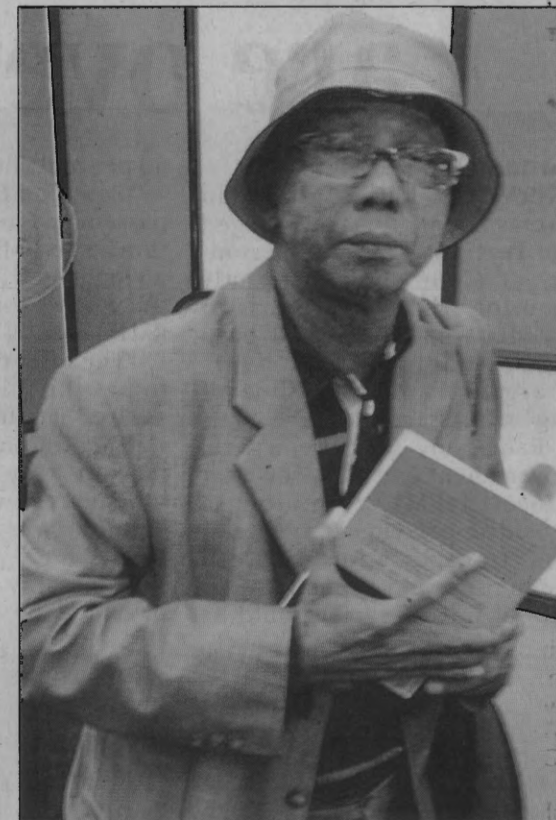
foreigners stayed here for so many years and also have been committing serious crimes like murder and use of firearms which resulted them in being in prison where 30 per cent of the inmates are foreigners," he said.

On the economy aspect, he said foreign workers in plantations, especially Indonesians who are keen to save money, would send Malaysian money to their families back home.

To a question by Conducting Officer Manoj Kurup on suggestions to address the problem, Wan Shawaluddin said the Government needs to be stricter in enforcing related laws.

For example, he noted that cases of employers found hiring illegal workers being punished are very few compared to the number of cases involving illegal immigrants committing offences in Sabah.

Wan Shawaluddin said economic migrants who came to Sabah in those days and had produced second and third generations here should be given proper documents and suitable acknowledgement given to the children of refugees who have stayed many years in Sabah.



Wan with his book.