

Ethnic Chinese still face hurdles to get ID cards: Survey

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Chinese-Indonesians are still being required by bureaucrats -- from immigration to civil registry offices -- to show citizenship certificates when applying for identity cards, passports and other official documents, a survey has revealed.

The study, carried out by the Indonesian Foundation for Legal Studies (YPHI), found 107 out of 114 Chinese-Indonesians surveyed still had to present their Indonesian Citizenship Certificates (SBKRI) as demanded by officials.

"This is the reality, although top officials in the country have repeatedly declared the SBKRI is no longer required," said YPHI researcher Lamria Siagian.

The survey was carried out between May and early December 2008, in Jakarta, Tangerang in Banten; Palembang in South Sumatra; and Pontianak in West Kalimantan.

Eighty respondents said they had to show their SBKRI at immigration offices, while 41 had to present them at civil registry offices.

"In addition to the SBKRI, many Chinese-Indonesians are also still required to pay extra fees of no less than Rp 1,000,000 when applying for an official document," the study added.

In 1996, then president Soeharto issued a decree scrapping the need for the SBKRI in obtaining official documents such as birth certificates, passport and ID cards.

However, many government offices did not comply, claiming a lack of technical guidance.

In 1999, Soeharto's successor B.J. Habibie issued his own instructions ordering all bureaucrats to implement the 1996 presidential decree.

In 2006, the citizenship law was enacted, aimed at ending the long-standing discrimination against minority groups over the SBKRI issue.

"We want to examine whether or not the 2006 law has effectively been implemented to end citizenship discrimination in dealing with the SBKRI," Lamria said.

The YPHI also spoke with officials from immigration and civil registry offices.

"We found top officials at immigration and civil registry offices insisted no SBKRI was required. But the story differed when we talked with lower-ranking officials. Many admitted they still required the SBKRI from Chinese-Indonesians," Lamria said.

The YPHI published its findings in brochures, including those for the North Jakarta civil registry agency, which claim the SBKRI is needed for ethnic-Chinese residents to apply for birth certificates.

YPHI chairman Frans Hendra Winarta said the poor implementation of the 2006 law had allowed discrimination against Chinese-Indonesians to remain unchecked.

He alleged only "naughty officials" demanded to see the SBKRI as they sought to extort or blackmail ethnic-Chinese citizens for money.

"In the past, Chinese-Indonesians spent between Rp 5 million to Rp 10 million to get an SBKRI. I think this is still about money," he said.

Several Chinese-Indonesians, including star badminton players Susi Susanti and Alan Budikusuma, have spoken out about being asked to show their SBKRI and about encountering difficulties in obtaining documents.

The Jakarta administration denies its civil registry offices in its five municipalities still demanded to see the SBKRI.

"We never demand the SBKRI -- it's the Chinese-Indonesians who submit it when they apply for official documents," said Erick Sinurat, an official at the Central Jakarta civil registry office.

