KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 15 — A retired banker alleged today that Sabah's founding father Tun Datu Mustapha Harun had masterminded "Projek IC", the notorious citizenship-for-votes initiative that has been blamed for the state's increasing foreign population.

Mat Swadi Alwi, Bank Pembangunan Kota Kinabalu's former branch manager, told the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) hearing in Sabah that Mustapha had initiated the scheme to help Barisan Nasional's (BN) USNO to wrest state power from Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) in the 1990 polls.

According to The Star Online, efforts to "Malaysianise" foreigners by turning them into voters under the Projek IC initiative kicked off between 1988 to 1999 and had been under the knowledge of then deputy home minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayob.

"My job was to increase the number of Muslim votes in constituencies where Usno was weak. "Not all of them were immigrants, some were voters from the military, police or teachers from peninsula Malaysia," Mat Swadi was quoted as saying in another news report by Malaysiakini. Explaining the initiative, the former banker later revealed that of the 20,000 new voters registered on the roll that year, some 15,000 were illegals.

He added that these voters were then used to increase votes from these so-called Muslim Bumiputeras at constituencies where USNO needed a boost, such as Papar, Inanam and Tuaran.

"Say for example if Usno lost to PBS in the 1996 election by 1,000 votes in Papar, we would send just over a 1,000 new voters there to ensure victory for Usno," he was quoted as saying by The Star.

Mat Swadi reportedly resigned from the initiative some time in 1990 when certain hiccups with records were found.

"One day I was called up by the then-EC secretary Abdul Rashid (Abdul Rahman), he showed me one identity card number (on the computer) and when he clicked it there were 20 names that came out. "He clicked another and there were 10 names... he asked me to explain which one is the genuine one. "I was taken by surprise, I couldn't answer, it was in a mess and I said if this is the case I will stop it," he said, according to Malaysiakini.

Asked later on the alleged involvement of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in the scheme, Mat Swadi said he never met the former prime minister.

The RCI was set up on August 11 to investigate claims that illegal aliens in Sabah were awarded citizenship and placed on the country's electoral roll in an illicit bid to keep the ruling government in power.

When announcing its formation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had also made known the commission's eight terms of reference, including investigating Sabah's abnormal spike in population.

Members of the panel include chairman chairman Tan Sri Steve Shim Lip Kiong, Universiti Malaysia Sabah vice-chancellor Professor Datuk Seri Dr Kamaruzaman Ampon; former Kuala Lumpur police chief Datuk Henry Chin Poy Wu; former Sabah state government secretary Datuk Kee Mustafa; and, former Sabah deputy chief minister and former Sabah attorney-general Tan Sri Herman J. Luping.

The RCI was initially scheduled to conclude on March 21 but was interrupted by the Sulu invasion of Lahad Datu in Sabah. It subsequently gained royal assent for an extension and will now terminate on September 21.