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By Johannes Ridu & Sharifah Arfah: MIRI, Oct 6 2004:

Some have died. Others are losing their memory and many are ailing. They are among a group of 399 former employees of Sarawak Shell Bhd and Sabah Shell Petroleum Co Ltd engaged in a protracted legal battle with their ex-employers over an estimated RM50 million they claim is rightfully theirs.

In November 2002 they sued their ex-employers, claiming that they unlawfully deducted money from their internal retirement funds, Shell Sarawak & Sabah Retirement Benefit Fund (RBF) and Shell Sarawak & Sabah Provident Fund (SSF).

Their combined claims were estimated at RM50 million, excluding interest also estimated at RM50 million. **They won their case at the Miri High Court on Sept 20** but their employers filed an appeal. The hearing date for the appeal has not been set.

One of the plaintiffs is 67-year-old Osman Sulong, who retired in 1994. "I have a heart problem. My arteries are blocked. I need the money for an operation," he said. Osman **worked for Shell for 41 years**, joining in 1953 as an office boy and retiring as a senior electrician. His memory is failing him, but fortunately he did not misplace his employment file.

Tsen Ah Ngio, 72, said Sarawak **Shell had unlawfully deducted** RM103,836 from his RBF when, as an assistant auditor, he left the company in 1986 under the Voluntary Separation Scheme. "I had a heart attack in 1987. **I almost exhausted my life's savings to pay the medical bills. I badly need the money,**" he said. Tsen joined Shell in 1955 as an account clerk. His last position was Assistant Auditor. He took the Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) in 1986.

Whether they and the other plaintiffs get their money will depend on the decision of the Court of Appeal. For now, all they can do is hope their time doesn't run out.

ARTICLE ENDS

Some two years later, Royal Dutch Shell management is still deliberately dragging out the case.