

PAS: Why was Israeli boxer allowed in?

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A special arrangement which allowed Israeli national Ilya Grad to compete in a Muay Thai competition in Malaysia has shown blatant inconsistency in the enforcement of the country's laws, charged PAS.

Its vice-president, Mahfuz Omar, said the allegation was shocking because the boxer claims that the Youth and Sports Ministry had made special arrangements for his visit.

He said Grad (right) himself had suspected something was amiss when he admitted that his passport was not stamped by immigration authorities and accused the government of "destroying the nation's policy".

"Israeli nationals are banned from entry while Malaysians are not allowed to visit Israel. How did Grad enter the country with the blessings of the minister, without going through the proper immigration process?

"This shows how porous our borders are. One can easily infiltrate (our country)," Mahfuz told Malaysiakini.

He said that the foreign minister and home minister must answer whether such allegations are true.

In a blog post on the Muay Thai Authority website on Oct 15, Grad said he was in Malaysia to participate in the AXN network's The Challenger Muay Thai reality television programme.

Judging from his article, it was clear that Grad was familiar with Malaysia's animosity towards Israel and the troubles he may encounter.

"Although some friends and loved ones were concerned and even urged me not to go, the thought I might just be the first to ever raise the Israeli flag in Malaysia was an idea I couldn't resist," said Grad.

Befriends local champ

However, he was assured that "some influential people" in Malaysia would ensure that there would be no hurdles for him to enter Malaysia.

Upon arriving at KLIA from Thailand, where he has been training for four years, the Israeli national was held by immigration authorities for 25 hours.

"After a long wait of 25 hours the Malaysian Muaythai Federation, with the support of the Malaysian sports minister, finally made it happen and got the necessary papers to let me into the country.

"Just like that I crossed the border with a special pass, a very special pass indeed for my Israeli passport wasn't even stamped!" wrote Grad.

During his stay in Malaysia, he was roommates with well-decorated Malaysian Muay Thai exponent Faizal Ramli. According to Grad, the two of them bonded.

But before his first and only fight on the programme, producers told Grad that he could not enter the ring with the Israeli flag and tried to persuade him to take up the Russian flag instead, to mark the country of his birth.

"It was absurd, I argued. I told the production that if they hang up any other flag I would not fight, plain

and simple,” he said.

Grad hopes for peace

As expected, Grad was met by jeers when he entered the ring with an Israeli flag, while his opponent was met with loud cheers which lasted throughout the match.

Grad eventually lost the match when it came down to the judges’ decision, which he said was biased as was the crowd, but said he left Malaysia with mixed emotions.

“The reaction of the local crowd and judges was simply biased but on the other hand, right after the fight many local faces approached me to congratulate me and apologise.

“Many said I have won, and some still write to me today. I’m proud to say that I made some good friends with the locals, including Malay champ Faizal.

“With the support of Malaysian ministers, we made an exceptional achievement to let an Israeli athlete fight in Malaysia holding the Israeli flag.

“It takes us one step forward to live in peace as a species and proves Malaysia to be a civilised and modern society!” he concluded in his article.

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