

'BN abused gov't agencies to persecute Suaram'

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By Ahmad Fadli KC

It is an abuse of power by the BN to exploit government agencies one after another to investigate human rights NGO Suaram, its adviser Kua Kia Soong said today.

He said this went against the spirit of a democratic society, where public agencies should be free from the influence of the ruling parties.

"In a democratic society, the civil servant is supposed to be independent from the government of the day.

"What we see now (is that) the government is directing the Companies Commission of Malaysia (CCM), Social Security Organisation (Socso) and Inland Revenue Board (IRB) (to investigate us).

"And now the minister wants Bank Negara to investigate. This is complete perversion of the civil service," Kua told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today.

He was responding to Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob's call to Bank Negara to investigate the claim that Suaram is funded by currency speculator George Soros.

Ismail said his ministry's probe has discovered that from 2007 to 2010, Suaram received more than RM558,500 from the philanthropist.

On Soros, Kua said the billionaire has the right to channel his money to whoever he thinks is appropriate.

'Soros uses his own money'

"What is wrong with George Soros? Whatever Soros does is none of our business.

"He doesn't use US or Hungarian rakyat's money. He uses his own means..." Kua added.

Asked whether Suaram will take action against Jaringan Melayu Malaysia, the organisation that had earlier lodged police report against Suaram, Kua replied that the NGO's priority is to champion other issues including the Scorpene scandal.

"We are keeping our eyes on the big things," he added.

The press conference was attended by representatives from 135 NGOs that are backing Suaram against the state's investigation.

Bersih co-chairperson S Ambiga described the investigation as harassment against the civil society.

"We will not allow Suaram to be alone. You are not taking on Suaram, you are taking on the civil society," she stressed.

Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) executive director Masjaliza Hamzah said receiving foreign funds for certain issues was a normal practice among local NGOs and even for the government.

Masjaliza said the Malaysian government also funded the movement against apartheid in South Africa and the liberation of Palestinians in Israel.

"It interferes with Suaram's ability to access funding, especially foreign funding. I think what has happened is nothing short of a witch hunt," she said.

Tenaganita executive director Irene Fernandez said the government's continued harassment was a bid to divert attention from the controversial purchase of Scorpene submarines.

"This bogey does not hold water anymore because the citizens are much more mature today. It is important that the government stops the harassment and starts addressing the real issues."

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