

Bersih leaders decry harassment at airports

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At least three Bersih committee members have been temporarily stopped while attempting to board international flights since last month.

Although they were eventually allowed to travel, the trio - Andrew Khoo, Maria Chin Abdullah and Yeo Yang Poh - said this was an attempt to harass them in the wake of the government move to tighten the screws on NGOs.

Lawyer Khoo (left), who was on his way to Bangkok for a conference yesterday, was stopped for 15 minutes at the KL International Airport (KLIA).

"I had to go and see an immigration officer, who made a phone call for clearance. They said there was a police file on my record," he said when contacted by Malaysiakini.

He speculated that the authorities may have decided on the move recently as he was able to travel to the Philippines on Sept 9 without problems.

"This is an unnecessary encumbrance on my freedom to travel," he lamented.

Khoo added he had no existing police cases against him except for a lawsuit initiated by the government against Bersih for damages caused during its April 28 rally.

Similarly, women's activist Maria (right) was on Sept 18 stopped by immigration officers when attempting to leave for Nepal via the Low Cost Carrier Terminal (LCCT).

"They stopped me for about 20 minutes. Eventually they allowed me to go through immigration but they informed me there was a police case against me," she said when contacted.

A case of paranoia

Maria said while there had been several police investigations against her on Bersih's activities, she had never been charged with any offence.

"This is serious harassment against us, we have not committed a crime," she said.

Also facing the same problem was Yeo (right), a former Bar Council chairperson who lives in Johor Baru and frequently travels to Singapore.

"I had two experiences in September when going to Singapore. They required me to go to the immigration office for clearance," he said.

Describing this as a case of paranoia, Yeo said the government would do better to allow immigration officers to do their job rather than to look out for Bersih leaders.

"They should stop doing this. This is something that makes them look bad - for attempting to harass citizens," he said.

"This is a pointless exercise and it is really laughable."

Meanwhile, in a press conference held today, Maria revealed another Bersih committee member Wong Chin Huat also faces a similar harassment, making the total count to four people.

"When Chin Huat put his passport into the machine, it was rejected and he had to go through an immigration officer."

When contacted, Wong confirmed that the incident had happened on Sept 17 when he was preparing to take a flight to Hong Kong via LCCT.

Commenting on the incidents, Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevesan condemned this as an "act of harassment and intimidation of the highest order".

"Clearly they are targeting (Bersih committee) members and this is a form of harassment."

Wondering whether she is also on the list, the former Bar Council president added that she will go overseas next week and she will know then.

"I suspect I am (in the list)."

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