

Bersih says deportation shows Taib fears high voter turnout
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, March 10 — Bersih accused Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud of fearing a high turnout in the coming general election after its steering committee member Maria Chin Abdullah was denied entry by the state this morning.

The electoral reform group said in a statement this afternoon that Maria flew to Kuching to launch the Jom100 campaign aimed at achieving 100 per cent turnout to avoid electoral fraud.

“Taib’s act clearly shows that he is terrified by high turnout of Sarawakians in the coming general election,” it said.

She is the fourth Bersih leader to be stopped from entering the state.

Bersih chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan was refused entry during the state polls last April and the High Court ruled against her in August when she tried to challenge the state government’s decision.

Sarawak and Sabah are allowed to deny entry, even to Malaysians, under the agreement to form Malaysia in 1963 with Malaya and Singapore, but must give a reason for doing so.

Bersih said today Taib had abused the immigration control power given to the state as it was only meant to “prevent economic transmigration and not political and social interaction between east and west Malaysians.”

It said that section 67 of the Immigration Act clearly protects the right of “a citizen entering the East Malaysian State for the sole purpose of engaging in legitimate political activity.”

Ambiga was stopped at Kuching International Airport on April 15, but no reasons were given as to why she was barred from entering the hornbill state where she was to monitor the polling process the next day.

The former Malaysian Bar president was travelling with two other Bersih 2.0 committee members — Subramaniam Pillay, a member of Aliran,

and Arul Prakash, a programme officer of Komas — and Ivy Josiah, executive director of the Women’s Aid Organisation.

The trio were allowed in.

Maria joins a list of activists who also include Haris Ibrahim, Steven Ng, Cynthia Gabriel, Wong Chin Huat, Johan Tan and PKR’s Subang MP Sivarasa Rasiah, who were denied entry to the state in the days leading up to the state election where the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) easily obtained a majority.

Long-serving Chief Minister Taib has not responded to criticisms about denying entry to Malaysian activists while Putrajaya has also remained silent over a citizen's right to free movement within the federation.

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