

Ambiga backs Pakatan's KL rally despite crackdown
Malaysian Insider
June 4, 2013
By Boo Su-Lyn

PUTRAJAYA, June 4 — Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan today supported Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) right to organise a "Black 505" mass rally in Kuala Lumpur on June 15 amid a government crackdown on opposition figures and activists.

The chief of the Bersih 2.0 polls watchdog noted that one of the aims of the rally was to call for the resignation of top Election Commission (EC) officials due to widespread reports of electoral fraud in the May 5 general election.

"Everyone has the constitutional right to hold the rally," Ambiga told reporters at the Immigration Department headquarters here.

"We think the EC should resign," added the former Bar Council president.

Ambiga had come for a meeting with Immigration Department director-general Datuk Alias Ahmad to get an explanation on his recent reported statement that the passports of over 6,000 Malaysians will be cancelled for tarnishing the country's image overseas.

But his officers told her that he was currently unavailable and that a meeting would be arranged next week instead.

Ambiga said she agreed with PR's demands for EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yusof and his deputy Datuk Wan Ahmad Wan Omar to step down to effect real change.

The electoral reform activist said last Saturday that it was meaningless to put the EC under the control of a bipartisan parliamentary select committee (PSC) if the election regulator was not injected with new blood.

Five men — politicians Tamrin Ghafar and Chua Tian Chang, along with activists Haris Ibrahim, Muhammad Safwan Anang and Hishammuddin Rais — were charged with sedition last week for uttering words that have the tendency to call on Malaysians to unlawfully change the government.

Tens of thousands have flooded PR's "Black 505" rallies against vote-rigging across the country after Election 2013 that saw Barisan Nasional (BN) retain power with a slimmer majority of just 133 federal seats to PR's 89.

Ambiga also pointed out that there was a 2009 Federal Court ruling that went against a 1979 Federal Court ruling that Alias had quoted to back the government's right to "issue, not issue, delay the issuance of or revoke a passport".

"This is at the government's discretion. The passport belongs to the government," Alias was quoted as saying by news portal Malaysiakini last Saturday.

Alias also reportedly said that the Immigration Department would revoke the passports of 6,564 Malaysians who have been blacklisted, noting that most of them were convicted of drug-related crimes or other crimes, and not just those who took part in demonstrations overseas.

"In 2009, the Federal Court disapproved of that," said Ambiga, referring to the 1979 ruling.

The prominent lawyer also stressed that Sabah and Sarawak could not abuse their right to restrict entry, after a letter from Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman's office and the state's Immigration Department was leaked yesterday, revealing that she, PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar and DAP adviser Lim Kit Siang were among those barred from entering the state.

"It's in very, very restricted circumstances that you can stop a citizen of Malaysia from entering Sabah and Sarawak. You cannot abuse it," she said.

Sabah police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Hamza Taib said yesterday that the ban on Nurul Izzah entering the Borneo state has been lifted, denying also that other individuals were placed on a travel blacklist

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