

If Sabah, Sarawak so safe for BN, why fear activists?

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BY ELIZABETH ZACHARIAH

The entry ban by Sarawak on a prominent British activist a couple of days ago is something of a riddle, given that Sarawak and Sabah have proven so safe for the ruling coalition that their vote bank is often described as a "fixed deposit".

Why then would they be so jittery that they have banned a half-dozen prominent opposition figures in the past year alone, including Nurul Izzah and Ambiga Sreenevasan, before banning Clare Rewcastle Brown on Wednesday?

When asked about East Malaysia's aversion to activists – all of whom are Malaysians, except for Rewcastle – Barisan Nasional's Datuk Dr Ewon Ebin would only say that the East Malaysian state governments acted "according to laws and regulations" of their state.

"They would not simply deny entry to anyone. They have their reasons," the Ranau MP said, refusing to comment further.

Rewcastle, who is also the sister-in-law of former British prime minister Gordon Brown, was flying into Sarawak to testify in a defamation suit that she described as stacked against her.

A former BBC journalist, she is the editor of whistleblower website Sarawak Report and Radio Free Sarawak.

She was denied entry at the airport by the state Immigration Department and deported to Singapore less than three hours later, from where she left for London.

Ambiga Sreenevasan Stampin MP Julian Tan questioned: "What kind of a threat does the Sarawak government think she presents to the state? If she was a terrorist, we can understand. But she was sued and then not allowed to enter her defence? This is totally absurd."

He added: "What kind of image of ourselves are we portraying to the world? Is this the kind of treatment a so-called democratic country gives to a foreigner?"

Bandar Kuching MP Chong Chieng Jen said the state government was "hampering the course of justice" by denying Rewcastle entry into Sarawak.

"She is here to defend herself. Nothing else. It is part and parcel of the administration of justice.

"As much as the government does not care for her, it should not be a reason for them to keep her out of Sarawak."

Chong, who had recently ruffled the feathers of the state chief minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud by revealing in Parliament that Taib and his family had amassed 24 plots of land in Sarawak worth about RM1 billion for a fraction of its market value through his office, described the ban on Rewcastle as an "an abuse of power".

Tian Chua "This is absolutely wrong. It puts Sarawak and its government in bad light, and all

because Rewcastle has been critical of the state leadership."

The actions of the two states are seemingly at odds with their position within the coalition, where they provided more than 40 per cent of the 133 seats won in the last polls.

For achieving a similar track record in the past, they are often described as an unassailable vote bank for BN.

R Sivarasa Yet in the past year, six opposition figures and one political activist were banned from entering the Borneo states.

Stampin MP Julian Tan said: "As a Malaysian, you are not even allowed to enter a state in your own country?"

Nurul, the PKR vice-president was denied entry into Sabah when she arrived at Kota Kinabalu on May 31, 2013, for the Kaamatan celebration.

A month earlier, Batu MP Tian Chua, who is also a PKR vice-president, was dished out similar treatment when his flight from Kuala Lumpur landed at the same airport.

On Sept 24, 2012 activist and artist Mohd Fahmi Reza Mohd Zarin, who is known for initiating the "Occupy Dataran" movement, was hustled out of Sarawak.

Others who were denied entry into Sarawak include Bersih 2.0 chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan, PKR's Subang MP R. Sivarasa and political analyst Dr Wong Chin Huat. – July 5, 2013.

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