

Taib has 14-year travel ban on my Sarawak lawyer, says activist Rewcastle Brown
Malaysian Insider
July 6 , 2013
By Rita Jong

There is a curious twist to the story of the British activist banned from entering Sarawak.

The same security office of Chief Minister Tan Sri Taib Mahmud that would not let her enter the state last week to defend herself in a legal suit there, has apparently also banned her Malaysian lawyer from leaving the country – for the past 14 years.

Activist Clare Rewcastle Brown revealed this about her lawyer See Chee How in an exclusive interview with The Malaysian Insider.

"See is restricted from travelling outside Malaysia on similar orders from Sarawak CM, even though he is an elected member of the state assembly," she said.

See, the state assemblyman for the urban area of Batu Lintang in Sarawak, confirmed the ban on him when contacted by The Malaysian Insider yesterday by phone.

He said the last time he left Malaysia was to Myanmar 14 years ago for an international campaign.

"After I returned, I was then prohibited from leaving the country," he added.

Rewcastle Brown said in an email interview: "His offence was to show support many years ago for a demonstration requesting the liberation of Aung San Suu Kyi. It tells you all you need to know about Taib Mahmud and how he runs Sarawak."

See was with Rewcastle Brown when she tried to enter Sarawak to meet him to discuss the defamation suit brought against her.

But the way the lawyer and his client are handling their different bans is itself another twist to the tale.

The one-term assemblyman laughed off the ban, saying it was not a hindrance to his daily life, as "there was a lot of work to be done here."

His client, Rewcastle Brown, who is also the sister-in-law of former British prime minister Gordon Brown, said her entry ban into the state was "nothing personal" and it would not make her more determined to expose Taib's alleged wrongdoings.

The former BBC journalist is the founder of the influential blog, Sarawak Report and Radio Free Sarawak, which are both critical of the chief minister.

"I would not be criticising Taib out of some sort of wounded pride. I am just focused on exposing a great wrong that has taken place in Sarawak because it has not been adequately covered for a variety of reasons," Rewcastle Brown told The Malaysian Insider.

She was denied entry on Wednesday when she flew into Sarawak to defend herself in a defamation suit brought against her by a company, which is listed on the stock exchange in the United Kingdom and Europe.

Immigration Department officers stopped her and said they were acting on the "orders from the CM's office". Rewcastle Brown was forced to board a flight back to Singapore before heading back to London.

"I was actually treated with customary Malaysian good manners and hospitality by the immigration staff. They, however, told me that the CM's office did not want me to enter the state," she said.

She added that she hoped the ban fully demonstrated that the attempt to sue her in Kuching rather than in London was totally inappropriate and that the Sarawak Court will now dismiss her case.

"While the people complaining against me have business in London and more than adequate means to jet freely to and fro, I cannot even enter Sarawak," she noted.

Rewcastle Brown also said there had been many public threats made against her, accusing her of certain offences which carry severe punishment in Malaysia.

"In particular that of sedition, an offence that I understand Malaysia's PM indicated to the British PM this week that he would abolish," she added.

"Meanwhile, it remains one of the many barriers to democracy and press freedom in Malaysia." – July 6, 2013.

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