

Only in Malaysia: lawyer under travel ban for supporting Suu Kyi even after she walks free

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By Rita Jong

Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi is the famous face of democracy. After years and years of house arrest in Myanmar, she now goes anywhere she wants in the world.

Not so much the Malaysian lawyer who went to Suu Kyi's homeland 14 years ago to campaign for her release then.

His forced restriction to Malaysia was invisible to the world until the past week when British activist Clare Rewcastle Brown highlighted it after she was thrown out of Sarawak, when she tried to enter the state. He was her lawyer for the defamation suit she was flying in to defend.

Activist, lawyer and Sarawak PKR vice-chairman, See Chee How (pic), had his passport confiscated by Sarawak in 1999 when he returned from Myanmar. Up to today, he still cannot step outside Malaysia.

Here is another interesting fact. This 14-year confinement on travel? It is his second ban.

He was first banned from leaving Malaysia in 1994 – five years before this current ban – when he returned to Kuching after going to Europe with Sarawak natives to champion their rights. The natives were spared.

He re-applied for an international passport 14 years ago, was given one, then it was taken away when he returned from Myanmar.

This was done under the authority of Sarawak's state security office. Rewcastle Brown is sure the order to them came from Sarawak chief minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud.

Speaking to The Malaysian Insider, See said he does not know of any other person banned from travel outside Malaysia by the Sarawak government.

"When they took away my passport for the second time, they did not tell me how long I was banned from leaving the country," he said.

Being a politician and a lawyer, he has the means to challenge the ban but See is not doing that.

"I have no time to challenge the ban nor did I make any attempt to leave the country," he said by phone.

"I am busy. I am actively fighting the Native Customary Rights cases and that takes up a lot of my time. There is so much to do here in our own backyard."

See was born in Kuching and started his career as a lawyer and became an environmental activist before deciding to fight for the rights of the indigenous people.

When asked how long he thinks he would be prohibited from leaving the country, he said: "I

have no idea. But I hope it would not extend to another 16 years. I have a nine-year-old son and I may have to attend his graduation if he decides to study abroad." – July 7, 2013.

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