

DAP's Zairil puts the spotlight on local travel scams
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DAP expressed concern that errant travel agents appeared to be exploiting loopholes in the system to escape the law.

Bukit Bendera MP Zairil Khir Johari (pic) said many licensed travel agencies are using unlicensed companies to market and sell tour packages to the public, which is illegal.

Zairil highlighted on Monday the need to review the framework governing travel operators. This was in light of alleged tour scams for holidaymakers and Muslim pilgrims seeking to perform the umrah.

He said when authorities probe into unlicensed companies, licensed agencies may escape scrutiny.

"Even if the licensed agencies face action such as having their licenses revoked and being blacklisted, their directors may not be affected."

He cited a case in Penang where travel operator called Lohas Premium victimised a couple.

"The company is seemingly able to circumvent existing regulations by using three different company names," he said in a statement today.

Zairil said a search on the operator showed that there were three companies having the same two directors.

They are Lohas Premium Travel and Lifestyle Sdn Bhd, Lohas Premium Holidays

Sdn Bhd, and Lohas Premium Vacation Sdn Bhd.

A check with the Tourism and Culture Ministry (Motour) revealed that only Lohas Premium Vacation is officially licensed and registered by the ministry, he said.

"This means the other two are unlicensed and cannot be used to sell outbound tour packages.

"But the travel agency had actually been using the two unlicensed companies to market and advertise their products," he claimed.

"This brings into question whether it is an intended strategy," said Zairil.

The Tourism Industry Act 1992 states that the ministry has the power to fine or revoke the license of an offending travel agent, provided it is licensed.

Meanwhile, cases involving unlicensed companies will be referred to the police and charged under the penal code.

"In this context, how will Lohas Premium and other companies that use a similar strategy be dealt with?

"Unless victims are sharp enough to catch the nuances, they would most likely lodge a complaint against the company that sold them the package," he said.

Zairil also said that when a company's license is revoked, the company is blacklisted, but the directors are not.

"This essentially allows the same directors to circumvent the system and continue operating through different company names."

He said Tourism Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz revealed in a parliamentary reply last month that 14 companies had their licenses revoked in 2009 while one unlicensed company is facing criminal charges.

Zairil said the reply revealed curious information about a blacklisted company called Lohas Leisure Holiday, which lost its license in 2009.

"The ministry is unable to confirm if this company is related to Lohas Premium or its directors. A company search has also failed to turn up any information on Lohas Leisure Holiday.

"This further emphasises the need to hold directors personally accountable, rather than simply punishing the vehicle used to scam unsuspecting customers.

"I call upon Motour to take immediate measures to address these loopholes that allow crafty conmen to cheat the public." Zairil said. – July16, 2014.

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