

Confusion leaves many frustrated at KLIA



On the front line: Auxiliary police personnel monitoring temperatures at the main entrance of the departure hall at KLIA in Sepang. — AFP

Traveller: Airport-Immigration communication lacking

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysians working and studying abroad are fuming about the confusion over procedures for leaving the country during the movement control order (MCO) period.

A group of Malaysians who were scheduled to leave for their respective destinations abroad were barred from leaving the country by Immigration officers at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) early yesterday morning.

Wan Nur Amira Rahmat, a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, said Immigration officers did not allow her to leave the departure hall.

She said everything was fine when she dropped off her luggage at the check-in counter but trouble arose at the Immigration counter when she tried to get to the departure gate.

She was eventually earmarked to be offloaded.

"There is no communication between the Immigration head and the Immigration ground operations in KLIA. It was a mess and unfortunately we became a victim of circumstance.

"The government should have been clearer on the procedures as the recent directive caused a lot of confusion and contradiction," said the 31-year-old yesterday.

On Sept 11, the Immigration Department updated its list of procedures for Malaysians entering and exiting the country during the recovery MCO.

In the list, diplomats and their dependants, students leaving to continue their studies and those who have been offered a place to study abroad need not apply to the department to leave the country.

Students going abroad to sit for examinations and Malaysians who are long-term pass holders of another country, such as permanent residents and petroleum and shipping companies employees who must sign on to the vessel abroad, also need not apply.

Those who need the department's approval include Malaysians who returned to the country during the MCO period, those who have received job offers and are travelling abroad for meetings, seminars, exhibitions and business, parents planning to accompany their children abroad for studies and those who need to travel due to an emergency.

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Wan Nur said the government should also give a grace period for such "sudden regulation" that would affect many who have all the valid travel documents and visas.

She said she would now have to bear the new airfare and tax difference for the new flight.

A student from an art school in Glasgow, who only wanted to be known as Wang, said she was "so annoyed and disappointed by the government's decision".

"They came out with the new rules on the night of Sept 11 and expected everyone to check Facebook constantly.

"I don't think this is a proper way to highlight the newly-implemented rules.

"Also, the rules should come with a grace period. I don't mind going through the trouble to get the approval but they didn't even give us sufficient time to do so," the 27-year-old said.

Wang said the incident had ruined her entire plans to resume her studies in Britain which starts tomorrow.

Meanwhile, Anushka Devasher, who is a British permanent resident (PR), said her husband, daughter, mother and sister were allowed to board the flight but not her.

Prior to their flight, Anushka said she had on numerous occasions checked with the Immigration Department whether she needed approval to leave the country but was told that she did not as she was a British PR.

However, Anushka said when she

arrived at the airport, she was prevented from boarding the flight as she was told that she needed approval first.

"I came back in May during the MCO because my father was very ill. He passed away shortly after. I live in the UK and I'm about to lose my job because I have been away for so long.

"There is only so much I can do remotely and they have already been so understanding," the 33-year-old said.

Anushka, a chemical engineer, added that the new directive was not even an official announcement compared to the time when the government had made an announcement on the revised self-quarantine procedures for those returning from overseas.

"I am a PR of another country. I'm willing to sign the form that I will not return (to Malaysia). What they are doing is not safeguarding Malaysians from the pandemic.

"It is not like I'm posing a threat. I can understand if they want to prevent people from coming in but what is the rationale here? So what if I came back during the MCO period?" she asked.

Merlyna Kraal, 36, also expressed her frustration, explaining that she received conflicting information from Immigration officers to return to Belgium.

Initially, Kraal said she was told her husband needed approval to leave the country but she did not as she held a residence permit.

"We received permission both from Malaysian Immigration and the Belgium Embassy for him to travel with me for family reunification," she said.

But on the day of their flight, Kraal said she was prevented from boarding but her husband was allowed to return to Belgium.

"I have followed their standard operating procedure since day one when I returned to the country in August for my wedding. It is extremely frustrating with the confusing rules," the senior treasury analyst said.

The Immigration Department yesterday reiterated in a statement that students who are continuing their studies and those who have just received study offers; students taking exams; and long-term pass holders of other countries (permanent residents/resident pass/employment pass and others) do not need prior approval to exit the country.