

Najib endorsed threats against me, says Ambiga
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Bersih 2.0 chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan has accused the prime minister of "endorsing" threats against her in the run-up to the public rally for electoral reform on July 9 last year.

Recounting the "horrifying" experiences, she told the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) public inquiry today that her personal safety was "intimidated by state actors and non-state actors alike".

bersih pc on jom 100 170112 ambigaThe former Bar Council president cited a report in news portal The Malaysian Insider, which quoted premier Najib Abdul Razak as supporting Pertubuhan Seni Silat Lincak Malaysia, an organisation of silat groups.

The group had warned that it would take on Bersih 2.0 if the rally was not called off.

"I believe, if there are evil enemies who want to attack the country from without and within, 'anak-anak lincak' will rise to fight them," Najib reportedly said two days before the rally.

On July 2, Ambiga related, Najib had labelled her as a "threat to Islam" when he said: "Who doesn't know Ambiga. She's the one who threatened Islam. And below her is Mat Sabu."

In Bersih's submission to the panel, the committee members of the coalition had also emphasised that Bersih was being attacked by Women, Family and Community Development Minister Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussien and the Election Commission, among others.

She was also accused of being supportive of apostates for purportedly having represented Azlina Jailani who converted to Christianity and who then took the government to court for refusing to allow her to change her name to Lina Joy in her identity card.

"There were calls to strip me of my citizenship, attacks by state-controlled media and I believe that all this was condoned by the government," said Ambiga.

In strengthening her testimony, she submitted news reports and clippings as well as copies of 'public service announcements' on government-owned Radio Television Malaysia "demonising Bersih".

NONE "Not only I was in danger but my faith was also attacked," she said.

Ambiga pointed out Perkasa's veiled threat when their chief Ibrahim Ali warned the Chinese against joining the rally, asking them to stay home and "stock up on food", in reference to the curfew declared during the 1969 racial riots.

"(On top of that), I was called a traitor... the chief minister of Malacca wanted my citizenship revoked," she said, referring to Ali Rustam's statement that Ambiga was hell-bent on creating chaos.

Ali had also expressed worry that members of the silat groups could not be controlled and if anything untoward was to take place, the government should not be blamed.

"However, until today none of them (who threatened me) have been charged, maybe called in for a statement (to be recorded), but that's about it... nothing happened although it was an open threat of criminal intimidation."

Furthermore, the mainstream media had blatantly accused Bersih 2.0 of being a front for Christian, Jewish and foreign groups, said Ambiga, who also faced the accusation that foreign funds had been

channelled into her personal account.

"I was given the impression that my accounts were being investigated. If they were, the authorities till today have had no decency to clear me of the accusations," she said.

'Absolutely horrified'

Suhakam vice-chairperson and panel head Khaw Lake Tee then asked Ambiga to describe how she felt when everything was brought to her knowledge.

"Well it didn't make me happy. It was very discomfoting. I was absolutely horrified at the extent they would go to, to stop the rally," she responded.

"There was a clear intention to cause me harm... that's why I had to hire a bodyguard upon my family's insistence."

The threats, she said, made her fear that she was being followed and that her mobile phone was being tapped.

NONEWhen conducting officer Ameer Izyanif Hamzah asked if there were any direct threats of physical violence, Ambiga told the panel about the SMS threat that was circulated on June 23.

"Besides the text- message there was also a Twitter feed by Papagomo, who I believe is widely known to be well-connected to Umno, who called for me to be gang-raped. So disgraceful," she said.

This was not the only threat, said Ambiga, and so she proceeded to lodge a police report.

Asked why she had not reported the other threats, Ambiga replied: "Firstly, I was told that there is no need to report all the instances as the police don't need one to initiate investigations.

"Secondly, it is not practical... I would have to go every day then, because we were threatened often.

"Thirdly, I felt that the entire machinery of the state and the authorities were against me, so I felt there was no point."

However, the threats did not hinder her day-to-day activities, said Ambiga, although her family members were very concerned for her safety.

'Gasping for air'

Ambiga then proceeded to describe what had taken place when the Bersih 2.0 leadership, as well as members of the opposition and non-governmental groups decided to stay at the Hilton Hotel opposite KL Sentral on the eve of the rally.

Ambiga was one of 91 individuals listed in a restriction order obtained by the police, to stop them from being present at several spots in Kuala Lumpur on July 9.

As KL Sentral was not specifically noted in the order, the group gathered at the tunnel-like bus underpass at the transport hub, intending to march to Stadium Merdeka via Jalan Tun Sambanthan.

"We came down the escalator and headed out and I was able to see the police beating their shields menacingly (although) I was not in the front line at that time.

"One person was speaking through the loudhailer but it was inaudible because I was inside the tunnel."

The police had blocked their path, preventing them from moving forward, she said.

"I pushed through to the side of the wall to discuss with others on what to do next.

NONE" Suddenly they (the police) fired tear gas at us. After the first round they continued firing at us, instead of giving us time to (disperse) ... they acted in bad faith."

Ambiga recounted how she was gasping for air while they were all running towards the other exit, through which the buses usually enter the underpass.

However, tear gas canisters were being launched from the other end as well and left little room for the crowd to disperse, she recalled.

"I was completely disorientated. I thought I was going to die. There was definitely excessive use of tear gas.

"I remember repeatedly telling my bodyguard tak tahan lah (can't take any more) ..."

She said she felt that the police had ambushed the Bersih 2.0 supporters with the aim of "trying to harm us, then to disperse us".

"You don't use 14 canisters to disperse the crowd. If they wanted us to disperse, why fire from both sides?" she replied to Ameer who asked why she felt ambushed.

"There was only a narrow escalator left, I consider it as a reasonable escape route."

Ambiga, along with five others, were then arrested and taken to the Kuala Lumpur police contingent headquarters, where she was kept isolated from the others until her release.

She said she had no complaints about the treatment accorded to her after the arrest.

The inquiry is set to resume on Feb 13, when Ambiga will be questioned by observers from the Bar Council and the police force.

The Suhakam panel also intends to recall Brickfields district police chief Wan Abdul Bari Wan Abdul Khalid and several other witnesses.

The panel had intended to wrap up the proceedings today and finalise their report by April. However, due to unforeseen delays, the report is expected to be published later.

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