

No regrets joining Bersih 3.0, says MCA septuagenarian

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By Nigel Aw

As thousands of yellow-clad protesters took to the streets on April 28 in cities across the country for clean and fair elections, Malacca was no exception as some 5,000 protesters converged at the town's own public square, Dataran Pahlawan.

Kian Sit Har malacca mca wanita chief at bersih 3.0 Standing at the frontline of the protest and clad in matching bright yellow T-shirt and cap, was 73-year-old Kian Sit Har, whose photograph later made into the newspapers.

Kian's presence at the rally earned the wrath of Malacca Chief Minister Mohd Ali Rustam as the septuagenarian is no ordinary MCA member.

Kian joined MCA at the tender age of 18 when the country was on the cusp of independence, and went on to found the Malacca Wanita MCA in 1975, and through countless party elections, remains its president to this day - 37 years later.

But her elder politician status did not however protect her from Mohd Ali's ire as he accused Kian of backstabbing the BN and demanded that she resign from MCA.

Despite the furore, Kian told Malaysiakini in an interview at her office in Malacca last week that she had "no regrets" for participating in the Bersih 3.0 rally.

"I'm happy and proud that I had not missed this chance to stand with the young people," said the former senator, adding that it was a "lost" for those who did not join the rally.

The experience, she said, was unlike anything she had seen among young Malaysians previously.

"I saw so many young people, even beautiful ladies were willing to stand under the hot sun and chanted 'Bersih!'"

"Last time, the ladies wouldn't want to go for such things. They would be more worried about getting sunburn, but the young generation now care about their country," she said in reference to her work with women during her early years in Wanita MCA.

"I have never seen anything like this before."

Dataran Pahlawan also cordoned off

Explaining the photograph depicting her with a raised fist at the protest, Kian said she did not want to appear like a "MCA spy" by standing silently amongst protesters, and had decided to join in with chants of "Bersih".

"I arrived at about 12 noon, many people were already there. I admired the young people, they were very creative with their banners, they made special hats and even had something to wear on their nose," she chirped.

Like Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur, protesters in Malacca arrived that Saturday only to find their iconic Dataran Pahlawan - the place where 'Bapa Malaysia' Tunku Abdul Rahman had, immediately on returning from London, declared that Malaya would gain independence - had been cordoned off by the authorities.

"There was a brass band performing," she lamented. "I never heard about it (the event) before and only a few schools sent their team. Maybe it was organised at the last minute to prevent us from going in."

On the plus side, Kian said the police did not rough up protesters and their conduct was exemplary.

"I don't feel it was right to say that Bersih 3.0 had wanted to topple the government. The police here were very good, they only stood and watch. If the police in KL were like that, I don't think anything (untoward) would happen," she said.

"That day, the coffee shops were full of people, businesses were doing great. I spoke with other participants and we exchanged views. I made many new friends and met school teachers too," said Kian, who was herself a former teacher.

Kian stayed out of last July's Bersih 2.0 protest after MCA threatened disciplinary action against those who took part. But she decided to join the rally this time when MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek said the party would not object.

However, following Mohd Ali's criticism, Chua poured scorn on Kian. Nevertheless, he stated that the party would not take action against her to avoid turning her into a hero.

Kian defended her presence at the rally, pointing out that the demand for clean elections and the opposition to the Lynas rare earth processing plant - which was advocated by environmentalists at the Bersih 3.0 protest - are issues supported by the party.

She dismissed claims by Mohd Ali that her presence among the protest leaders suggested she had a hand in organising the rally.

Kian said there were other MCA members who had joined the protest though they were not from the party's top echelons.

"As a leader, we need to know what the people want and to stand with them," she insisted.

'Don't point the gun at me'

Asked to comment on rumours that she will be quitting MCA, Kian said that it had never crossed her mind.

"Of course, after how the president scolded me, people would expect me to leave the party.

"But I am faithful and loyal to the party, not the individuals in the party. Throughout my life, I've seen many party crises but I will not simply leave the party," she said.

Acknowledging the negative public sentiments against MCA, Kian stressed that Malaysians could serve the people "anywhere", be it in the opposition, the ruling party or even NGOs.

Aside from her role as a women's leader, Kian heads the Malaysian Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis (Malacca) and she is also the vice-chairperson of Rumah Sejahtera Bukit Baru, an old folks home.

The Bersih 3.0 protest, she said, was something that the party leaders needed to reflect on, rather than spending their time condemning her for her prominent participation in the event.

"Frankly speaking, as a MCA member, I'm worried - why so many young people, so many rakyat went to the streets (on that day), this is a big question mark for us.

"I hardly see these people before, even housewives came out... If there are weaknesses in BN, then we must change. Don't point the gun at me, I'm just an ordinary citizen," she said.

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