

Ambiga a victim of race and religion, says Pak Samad

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By Nigel Aw

Today, as Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan's Bukit Damansara residence is turned into a bizarre combination of a mini market, crime scene and conflict zone with pro- and anti-Ambiga groups taking their positions under the watchful eyes of the authorities outside her house, it is business as usual at the Bangsar Utama flat of her fellow co-chairperson A Samad Said.

Since the Bersih 3.0 protest on April 28 which organisers claimed saw some 250,000 participants taking to the streets of Kuala Lumpur, anti-Bersih groups have taken their counter-protest to the doorstep of Ambiga's residence with burger stalls, butt exercises and now, a mini-market.

But for the 77-year-old A Samad, or more fondly known as Pak Samad, the situation at his residence has been anything but unusual, despite his cheeky baiting of the protesters at Ambiga's residence.

This tale of two Bersih chiefs, Pak Samad said, is likely because Ambiga is being targeted for her race, religion and to some extent, gender; issues that are often played up by the powers-that-be.

“Ambiga should rightfully lead, she is a lawyer with vast experience, she has received various awards but unfortunately, she is an Indian, a non-Muslim, that is unfortunate.

“If Ambiga was me, these threats targeting her would not have happened,” he said in an interview with Malaysiakini on Tuesday.

Adding that race was inherently a contentious issue, he said this is being manipulated and perpetrated by the powers-that-be with claims such as the position of Malays are being threatened.

The national laureate added that he, too, has faced accusations of a similar nature, though not as severe as the harassment faced by Ambiga.

‘I’m already Malay, I want to be Malaysian’

Among the accusations, he said, was that he has betrayed his own race by participating in the Bersih movement.

“To say that I am not championing my race... There is no need to ask me to be Malay, I am already Malay, I want to be Malaysian,” he said in his usual poetic tone.

The septuagenarian added that he has also been labelled as senile, to which he said: “Then those who have invited me to speak, must be really foolish to invite a senile old man to talk.”

“I grow old not to become stupid, I grow old to become wiser,” he added.

His age, added Pak Samad, has allowed him to break free of being the “slave of power”, which he described as the mainstream media when he was a journalist and editor.

“At that time, I worked in the newspapers, a servant of the powers-that-be. That time, I thought, I had children to care for, a family to care for.

“Because of that, I swallowed whatever bitterness there was for the sake of my family... But now, I am prepared to be langgar (hit),” he said.

Pak Samad is perhaps the most prominent literati in the electoral reform movement, but not all his literary colleagues share his activism, with some frowning on his action.

“The literary community is quite divided... it is not about the label of literati, but for individuals to decide whether we want to improve our democracy,” he said.

Pak Samad added that it was not his duty to convince fellow literati to the cause, instead, it was up to them to ask their heart if they should join the movement.

“My duty is merely to explain the state of our country, whether we want this to continue or we want a change,” he said.

By opting for a ‘road not taken’ by many others of his stature, the spotlight has fallen on Pak Samad, who has since been offered bodyguard protection.

“But I rejected (the bodyguards), at my age and this point of my life, even with tens of bodyguards, if my time has come, I will still die... I do not want to be accompanied by bodyguards aside from my wife, that is fate, if it’s time for death then it is death,” he said.

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