

## **Demonising Ambiga could cost BN Indian votes**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**June 21, 2012**

**By Baradan Kuppusamy**

COMMENT The move to demonise Bersih chairman Ambiga Sreenevasan in the mainstream media, especially in the Malay language media and television, is beginning to have a negative effect on Indian voters, going by comments two MIC leaders made this week.

MIC central committee member S Vell Paari and MIC vice-president M Saravanan have expressed disappointment with the continued harassment of Ambiga and other members of the Bersih steering committee.

Recently, Kuala Lumpur City Hall sent a RM350,000 tab to Ambiga and steering committee member Maria Chin Abdullah for losses it claimed to have suffered on April 28, the day of the Bersih rally for clean and fair elections.

Earlier, the government sent the steering committee a bill demanding RM122,000 for damages to police vehicles, among other losses.

Vell Paari (right), whose name has been mentioned as an MIC candidate for Sungei Siput, feels the issue transcends political and racial boundaries.

He said sending the bills and the earlier demonstrations outside Ambiga's house amounted to demonising and harassment.

Vell Paari went on to call on the people to send messages to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak in the form of letters, postcards and telegrams, on how they feel about such treatment.

Saravanan, on the other hand, said Ambiga is an ordinary person but has been turned into an extraordinary person by unwise government actions.

"It has made her into a popular person and she has gained sympathy from the people.

"Our actions made her hero material... in this case a heroine," the federal territory and urban wellbeing deputy minister told the Free Malaysia Today website in an interview.

Prominently featured

Ambiga is also featured prominently- she is an almost daily event - in the Tamil vernacular press and her lineage has even been tied to the Sreenevasan brothers of PPP fame in the 60s and 70s.

Everything that has to do with her is front page material in the papers, so much so that MIC leaders are beginning to feel the heat because wherever they go, questions are asked of them, especially on the butt-dance outside Ambiga's house and now the government bills sent to her.

Prior to that, disgruntled burger sellers set up a stall outside Ambiga's residence to protest the losses they claimed to have suffered due to the rally, and this was followed by the dubious aerobic exercises of ex-servicemen.

While some in the Tamil vernacular press are open supporters of Ambiga and Pakatan, her popularity is such that there are even articles on her marital status and about her horoscope as well.

Although Ambiga has repeatedly said she is not interested in politics and will not be contesting in elections, many Indians out there think she should, and play a role as an MP and a party leader.

It brings memories of other women political leaders, like the late prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi, or even Burma's opposition leader Aung San Su Kyi.

Najib (left), who is also BN chairperson and who is enjoying a spring in his relations with Indian voters, is risking much in allowing the continued demonising of Ambiga and other Bersih steering committee members.

Perhaps Najib is allowing this because he continues to consolidate Malay voter support by doing so. However, he is beginning to lose Indian voter support as a consequence. One outweighs the other.

Perhaps he feels the loss of Indian votes is minimal, with many already in the hands of Pakatan, even if it has not been capitalising on Ambiga's new standing among Indians.

Indians find it easy to relate to Ambiga, whether she likes it or not, because she is also an Indian.

She is fast becoming a heroine for Indians and a spokeswoman of sorts in a community that lacks a strong voice, both from BN/MIC or Pakatan.

After the departure of former MIC strongman S Samy Vellu, there is a lacuna in the Indian community that the current MIC president G Palanivel is unable to fill with a strong voice.

The community is listless and directionless and lacking in strong leadership. In this lacuna, Ambiga is a growing presence - although such a situation may probably not be to her liking.