

The last ballad of PI Balasubramaniam

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By Hazlan Zakaria

COMMENT I can see him in the rear view mirror, sitting there in the backseat of my car.

Blinking in and out of existence, as inky darkness and conical shine from lone repetitive streetlights, alternate one another. Stalwart companions, accompanying my drive, into the dark night, slowly engulfing the deserted highway.

Smiling, grinning, looking as he did, when I interviewed him just a few days ago, at a private hospital in Subang Jaya.

Considering I just came back from viewing his body, at his family home in Rawang, his presence here is strange, and yet, perhaps not so.

NONEIt's not a ghastly ghostly presence either, not like in the scary movies. More like a celebration of all he is, and what he was.

And I like to think, it is a reminder of his final message, that I believe, is my duty to help spread.

I remember, at the interview days before, his chin and cheeks were full of half-white stubble, from unshaven days in the hospital.

But his eyes were dancing with mirth, his demeanour composed and calm. It was as close to him, being at peace, than I have ever seen before.

As he sat before my searching mien, at times his cheerful eyes looking at me and my cameraman Ravi, interviewing him.

At other moments, he would turn to bask in the love of his rambunctious sons and doting wife, present in the ward with him.

It was perhaps the best of him, that I have ever seen. As it was the last of him living, I ever did perceive.

Not his No 1 fan

I must confess, I was not his number one fan.

I have met and interviewed the former private eye P Balasubramaniam, or PI Bala as he was known, several times in my short career as journalist.

As all journos are, I was trained question and suspect everything and anything. I take all things heard or seen, with a very large dose of salt.

When I heard of Bala's story, both from his mouth and the news and tales of others, I was as skeptical as anyone could be. Okay, perhaps a little more.

My interviews with him revealed a man on the verge of paranoia, almost as if he was scared of his own shadow, a man who I believed, sold his testimony to the highest bidder.

Though, the grains of truth in his story, are polished by third party accounts, that does make for something worth considering, if not flat out believing.

The truth - as Special Agent Fox Mulder, from one of my favourite TV shows, the X-Files, would say - was out there.

But my take of his last ever interview with any media, was something else.

It probably does not have the legal weight of a deathbed testimony, but to me at least, it was the most honest account of his, and the most heartfelt.

While his earlier interviews evoked my curiosity, the last conversation we had, invoked my humanity.

It did not hit me at the time I was at his house, when I viewed the physical remains of the man I interviewed and chatted with several times.

Looking at his empty shell, lying under white funerary cloth. I was shaken up for a bit, I froze before the doorway, unable to walk any further into the living room.

I stood for a few seconds, registering that it was really him. Trying hard not to notice his daughter holding on to his feet, or the cries of his bereaved wife.

But my heart felt only numbness. I was in journo mode, alert for breaking events, my nose for news, so to speak, became my primary organ.

But driving the long road home, Bala's spirit re-awakened my humanity.

The first indication is a sinking feeling at the pit of my stomach, rising to a cold sensation on the left side of my chest, where my heart resides. A cold sinking feeling that stretched and wrapped around my once stilled humanity, before kick-starting it to beat again.

It is never easy to deal with death, even for a man supposedly hardened with personal tragedies and years of as jaded journalist. A life is valuable, and a life returned to the Infinite is a thing to be felt, a thing that should be felt, with gladness of their return to the Source, or sorrow at their passing.

But more so, every life has a purpose no matter how small. And maybe Bala's was to remind us of something we are too afraid to rekindle or have forgotten existed.

They say that the sum total of all we are in our life, is weighed and measured by the legacy of what we leave behind.

Everything we have ever done intersecting to that one moment when it is time to leave our earthly abode. That when we face Izrail the angel of death, our lives are stretched before us, as are our ultimate fate.

But such things are beyond my vision, behind the veil of the order of the world as Allah has ordained.

Though if I were to stake a guess, PI Bala was at peace.

His final message

I can only hope that when all things are over and done with, when I too sit there at the twilight of my life, I can be as calm and at peace as he was, I can be as clear as he was with what he wanted.

While I am still unsure of what my legacy shall be, I can only hope it would be of some worth.

But as for PI Bala, his legacy and his final message is clear to me.

What he wanted, was justice.

Justice for the murdered Altantuya.

"Every year, on Oct 19, I pray for her. I hope one day justice will be done."

Justice for the two police officers he believed were made scapegoats.

NONE"I want justice not only for Altantuya, but also for the two UTK (Unit Tindakan Khas or Special Action Unit) guys. You know how the UTK works, under instructions... We cannot simply send two innocent policemen to the gallows."

And more so, justice for the people of Malaysia.

"Let us change the government, (because) once changed, the case will be reopened. Then we will know who is guilty, who is not guilty. If the government is not going to be changed, we won't see the truth."

I look again into the rear view mirror and I saw Bala for the last time, he smiles and mouths again that one word he repeated so many times in my last chat with him:

"Justice."

Bala had also said that Altantuya and the Man upstairs does not want him to die yet, ironically just a few days before his death.

But despite his passing, maybe he is still here, for his memory, his crusade and his purpose, lived on in me and I hope in each and everyone of you Malaysians.

As polling near day nears, I would like to wish everyone good day, God speed and may Allah watch over each and every one of you, my brothers and sisters. For one, for all, for our generations, may "justice" guide your hearts.

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