

**Pak Samad, Ambiga form new NGO to fight racism**  
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National laureate A Samad Said and former Malaysian Bar president Ambiga Sreenevasan have formed a new NGO to battle racism and extremism in the nation.

The outfit is called, "A people's movement to reclaim our nation (Negara-Ku)".

Speaking at the launch today, Ambiga (left) said following the last general election, there has been an increase in racial and religious rhetoric in the country, as if certain quarters have a "hidden agenda" to create chaos.

These, she said, included "statements from certain leaders" about the May 13 racial riots of 1969.

Both Samad and Ambiga were former chairpersons of electoral watchdog Bersih. Joining them in Negara-Ku is former judge and human rights commissioner Simon Sipaun.

The coalition is made up of 60 other NGOs and is chaired by former Bersih steering committee member and Ikram vice-president Zaid Kamaruddin.

Nation-building neglected

Zaid (middle, in photo below) said the coalition is non-partisan and aimed at educating the rakyat on the constitution and their rights to resist extremist elements in the country.

"We (the steering committee) will meet to develop an action plan. We have many ideas, and we propose to have a roadshow, including entering schools, to make sure we touch all sectors of the community," he said.

Meanwhile, Samad (seated on the left), who is fondly known as Pak Samad, lamented that political parties focus more on the short-term goal of expanding influence, rather than on nation-building.

"Racial and religious sentiments are used, undermining the spirit of tolerance and encouraging extremism.

"The government, either by default or by intention, has failed to curb this harmful development," Samad said.

Most of the NGOs in the coalition are also part of Bersih, including Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia, Pusat Komus and the Malaysian Indian Action Team (Miat).

Also presented at the launch was Negara-Ku's pledge, which will also be distributed across the nation to raise awareness.

The pledge is in six languages - Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese, Tamil, Iban and Kadazan.

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