

Periasamy: I'm no Lembah Pantai spoiler
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Former MIC leader N Periasamay may be seen by Barisan Nasional and opposition parties as the spoiler in the three-way contest for the Lembah Pantai parliamentary seat.

Periasamy, however, said he is only "blazing the way" to provide voters with an alternative in the elections.

"I wish to be seen as a launch pad for independent candidates. Whether you're a student or a worker or a missionary, I'm an example to prove that anybody can stand for elections," he said when met in Bangsar.

"If you have an expertise in or passion for a certain thing, you, too, can be a candidate."

He argued that the rise of Independent candidates will give voters the option of expressing dissent while avoiding the polarising and paralysing effects of partisan politics, as well as the 'government versus opposition' system.

As an Independent, he said he would be unencumbered by party dictates in that he can voice opinions or act according to his conscience or that of his constituents, if he is elected.

His decision to run in Lembah Pantai, Kuala Lumpur, has to do with his belief that voters are also looking to elect representatives who will articulate their concerns but not hinder government action "when necessary".

"Often, the opposition will reject a policy merely because they are opposition. In such a case, and especially if the government enjoys less than two-thirds majority, Independents are the answer (to fair consideration of laws)," he said.

Periasamy, 48 and a father of two, also noted the downside of leaving any party without a two-thirds majority, saying this could lead to instability and a snap election a few months down the road. Or, opposition representatives could be enticed to cross the floor.

Value of freedom

Periasamy was a MIC member from 1986 up to 2002 when he resigned as Bukit Bintang division deputy chairperson.

He quit due to restrictions and limitations he faced when trying to voice dissenting views.

"I don't hate the party. I just hate the system of restrictions that exists within every party. You're told you cannot go to the press, you cannot go against this person, you cannot say this or that," he said.

"As an Independent, I can say anything I think is right without worry. Once you're in a party, it's as if all your freedoms as an individual are lost."

Freedom, incidentally, is the cornerstone of Periasamy's campaign, which narrows down to

the abolition of the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the creation of Speaker's Corner in Lembah Pantai.

"The youth increasingly want to exercise their freedoms and stretch the limits. When young, they ask for greater freedoms (within the family). As they get older, they're going into the streets to demand other freedoms.

"Our minds should not be dictated by the laws of the previous century such as the ISA. We should not be suppressing dissent by dismissing this as being merely seditious."

However, he rejected claims that he is a supporter of the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) or its five leaders who were detained under the ISA last December. Periasamy said he is speaking up for the rights of all ISA detainees.

"The 'Hindraf 5' were only detained recently. The Malays have more than their fair share of ISA detainees, Of the more than 100 in Kamunting, at least 70 percent are Malays, about 27 percent are Chinese," he said.

He also denied he had been planted as a candidate by any party or organisation.

"I have earlier sworn in front of the press and I swear now. I am not a proxy or influenced by any political party. This is my own stand," he stressed.

Campaign to continue

Asked about his chances of winning, Periasamy said he has "a lot of supporters", particularly those who believe that Independent candidates can play a role in national politics.

He said he would continue to campaign in the next general election and encourage others to contest as Independents.

"I foresee as many as 10 such candidates running in the next election. I myself will try to help them to come up with the RM10,000 deposit for a parliamentary seat."

Asked to comment on the comparative sparseness of his posters, compared to glamorous posters of his rivals - BN's Shahrizat Abdul Jalil and PKR's Nurul Izzah Anwar - Periasamy took a swipe at his opponents.

"It may look like it, but we're not carrying out a beauty contest here. People should vote based on the capability of the candidates, not on how they look," he said.