

**'Lady of Liberty' at Bersih march draws online support**  
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**By Clara Chooi**



A screenshot of "Malaysian Lady of Liberty" as of 9.45am July 11 2011.

KUALA LUMPUR, July 11 — Quiet has settled over Saturday's chaos but one image is still making waves on the Internet — the picture of an elderly woman in yellow, drenched in rain and chemical-laced water, walking away from riot police while clutching on to a long-stemmed flower and a near-empty mineral water bottle.

She is Annie Ooi, a 65-year-old retired English teacher who took a bus from Setapak in the early morning of July 9 to join thousands of others in Bersih 2.0's march for free and fair elections. An unknown man had offered her the flower in the morning and she waved it like a flag throughout the four-hour march.

Netizens have dubbed her "Aunty Bersih", and even Malaysia's "Lady of Liberty", for placing her health and safety at risk to join a march the government had declared illegal.

Pictures of the diminutive Ooi strolling in the war zone that Kuala Lumpur had turned into are all over the Internet, inviting messages of awe and wonderment from netizens across the country.

On Facebook, at least three fan pages were set up in dedication to Ooi immediately after the event. One page called "[Malaysian Lady of Liberty](#)" attracted 17,176 "likes" as of 9am this morning.

Ooi was one of the few who dared to turn up in yellow to mark the occasion, despite earlier warnings that those with clothes indicating support for the outlawed Bersih 2.0 coalition would be arrested.

Speaking to The Malaysian Insider through her daughter over Facebook chat last night, Ooi confirmed that she had been tear gassed four times and sprayed with the water cannon once during Saturday's pandemonium.

She said she was unsure of what time the rally was scheduled to start or where, but was determined to support its cause by participating in it even if she had to do it alone.

"She took the bus to General Hospital because the roads into town were blocked," her daughter related. "She walked to Chow Kit, Maju Junction, went into the back lane of Little India to pass Masjid Jamek, avoiding cops, heading to National Mosque but was stopped at Dayabumi."

There, Ooi was interviewed by one uniformed policeman and four others in plainclothes. They asked for her IC and recorded her details, then asked her why she was dressed in yellow. "Why can't I wear yellow?" she asked in return.

According to a post by a blogger who claimed to have spoken to Ooi before the march began, the feisty retiree had asked other protesters why they did not turn up in yellow as well. "Why do we have to feel so scared in our own home land . . . and by own countrymen," she had reportedly said.

A newbie at street protests, Ooi also did not know what to do in the event that she got gassed, and had not brought anything to protect herself, her daughter said.



Annie Ooi Siew Lan "Lady of Liberty" next to Puduraya during the Bersih rally in Kuala Lumpur July 9 2011. — Picture by Jack Ooi

"She wasn't prepared for any of the attacks," her daughter said. "She went without protection; no goggles, no masks, no salt, nothing. It was horrible . . . the coughing, and didn't know how to stop the discomfort and pain. After the second gassing, she was offered salt by someone and it helped a lot."

Despite this, eyewitnesses claimed on the internet that Ooi had marched on determinedly during the protest and despite the chaos, even yelled at others not to run.

When told to ask her mother if she would dare to brave another march for the same cause, her daughter said, quoting Ooi, "Without a doubt".

"There was a very strong oneness in spirit which she had never felt before in this country," added the daughter again quoting Ooi. "Especially from the younger generation which have their years ahead of them yet marched on despite the possibility of ruining their lives by getting arrested."

Ooi was among the thousands of protesters who took to the streets of Kuala Lumpur on Saturday to march in support of Bersih 2.0's demand for electoral reforms.

More than a thousand people were arrested, and chaos broke out at midday after the police fired tear gas canisters and sprayed water cannons to break up the crowd.

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