

BN to face angrier Malaysians with continued crackdown, warns Ambiga
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BY CLARA CHOOI

KUALA LUMPUR, May 23 — Putrajaya will only face more wrath from right-thinking Malaysians if it continues its nationwide crackdown on opposition supporters, Datuk Ambiga Sreenivasan said today.

The civil rights activist and renowned lawyer said the sudden series of arrests and court charges exposes the new government's true face and intentions, which contradicts its earlier promise for national reconciliation.

"It reflects very badly on the new government. Let them never again try to use the word liberal," she told The Malaysian Insider over the phone this afternoon.

"National reconciliation? To me, they only know how to use words that they do not even understand.

"My own view is that they have no moral standing to claim of efforts for national reconciliation or to be more liberal... not after all these arrests," she added.

Ambiga was speaking to this news portal during her wait at the Jinjang police station where PKR and PAS MPs Chua Tian Chang and Tamrin Ghafar, as well as Anything But Umno (ABU) chief Haris Ibrahim, were brought to after they were arrested separately this afternoon.

Earlier this morning, Ambiga, who is also the co-chairman of Bersih 2.0, a coalition of NGOs fighting for a free and fair electoral system, accompanied student activist Adam Adli to the Sessions Court where the youth was charged with sedition for allegedly attempting to topple the Barisan Nasional (BN) government through street protests.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders, activists and opposition supporters nationwide have been protesting the results of the just-concluded May 5 polls, which saw BN returned to federal power despite earning only a minority of the total number of votes cast.

Due to the uneven dispersal of votes in numerous constituencies across Malaysia, which the opposition have labelled unfair gerrymandering, BN emerged victors with just under 48 per cent of the popular vote to PR's 51 per cent by snapping up 133 federal seats or 60 per cent of the 222 seats contested.

Adam, who first shot to fame in 2011 after a similar run-in with the authorities, was hauled in when he told a May 13 forum shortly after the polls that the only way to topple the BN government was not through elections but street protests.

Chua, Haris and Tamrin were also speakers at the same forum and their arrests today are believed to be due to their involvement in the event.

Ambiga said, however, that the authorities did not need to resort to arresting the leaders if they had merely wanted to rope them in for questioning on the event.

"I was told they have a list of names... I am sure these leaders would have been happy to come in and give statements.

"But arresting them... it is shocking, oppressive and to me, wholly unacceptable in a democracy. I view this as an abuse of powers," she said.

She pointed out that leaders like Chua were MPs and were unlikely to evade being hauled up for questioning.

"This is just telling, isn't it? It just exposes what they (the government) truly are. Their conducts before the elections were so different. What does that tell you?

"It tells you that they were just holding back before this. Fine. Let them do what they feel they have to do.

"But this would only serve to anger the people," she warned.

Earlier today, it was reported that over 1,000 copies of PAS-owned Malay newspaper Harakah were carted off by Home Ministry officials from shops and several distribution centres in a nationwide raid.

"Ya, Harakah was seized at several places this morning," the paper's editor, Zulkifli Sulong, told The Malaysian Insider when contacted.

The seized copies were of the paper's Friday edition dated May 24-26 carrying the front page headline "GST hadiah BN untuk rakyat [GST BN's gift to the people]".

Its online edition had earlier reported Harakah's marketing manager Ahmad Faisal Tawang saying he had received phone calls this morning from several distributors who informed him that the home ministry's officials were carrying out a sting to seize copies of the newspaper.

Home ministry officials had grabbed the paper from not only from the distribution centres but from shops and even from the back of lorries as they arrived at the distribution centres.

In Malacca, Harakah reported more than 500 copies seized, while in Alor Setar, Kedah, as many as 1,000 copies were taken.

"In Seremban, Negri Sembilan, the distribution centres were also raided by KDN," Ahmad Faisal was quoted saying, using the Malay initials for the home ministry, adding, "But in Kedah, the KDN did not show their enforcement cards and letter from KDN before acting.

Yesterday, the police arrested 18, including four women, at a candlelight vigil held for Adam outside the the Jinjang police station here. They have since been released.

Media reports say some 1,000 had gathered outside the police station, which was under tight security in anticipation of a continued night vigil since Adam Adli's detention on Saturday.

Newly-minted Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who took over the post from Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein in the Najib administration's new Cabinet, was reported by Umno-owned daily Utusan Malaysia last weekend as saying that the government would take stern action against those who intended to foment chaos on the streets.

Both Ahmad Zahid and the new Inspector-General of Police had been chided by opposition politicians "playing politics" instead of working to curb crime in the wake up the May 5 polls.

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