

Sarawak's Masing remains outspoken, says good for Malaysians
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Sarawak minister Tan Sri Dr James Masing has vowed to continue speaking up against injustices in the country even if it means going up against his Barisan Nasional (BN) colleagues and leaders, all for the good of the people.

The outspoken Land Development Minister, who is also a fierce critic of Putrajaya, said he will never change despite receiving brickbats from BN leaders, who have accused him of being the opposition tool to destroy the ruling coalition.

"I did lose some friends. But I am breaking ranks for the good of the community. People who do not understand this are not my friends anyway," he told The Malaysian Insider.

This, he said, was the legacy he wanted to leave for his children and the young people of Sarawak. A legacy of fighting for the victimised and for justice.

"I am not a rich man. I can only leave who I am during my lifetime. I want people to remember me as Masing's son, the one who fought for the people," the 65-year-old added.

Masing, who is the president of a BN component party in Sarawak – PRS, said that it has been ingrained in him from his undergraduate days in New Zealand, to "fight for what is right".

"It was put in me that there must be a sense of fairness in everything one does. So when I find something is not right, I am there to correct it.

"I don't care who it is, if I think they are not being fair, I will go after them. I really cannot stand it when I see others being victimised," he said.

Masing revealed that he had shared similar sentiments with former Umno leader Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah, who is now the chief executive officer of the Global Movement of Moderates, who is also known as a moderate who is vocal in his views even if they differed from those of his party.

"I had a chat with him once and told him not to be worried about breaking ranks (with BN) for the good of the people. I told him not to be scared of doing the right thing," he said.

"Malaysia cannot afford not to have a moderate society because we are multicultural.

If you are not a moderate, you have no place in this society."

Masing was commenting on the criticisms he had received from BN leaders, including from former information minister Tan Sri Zainuddin Maidin, who had accused him of unknowingly becoming a tool for Pakatan Rakyat while causing much confusion with his comments.

The Sarawak minister had earlier likened the Customs Department's seizure of Christian materials containing the word Allah on October 25 to growing religious extremism in the country.

He had also previously slammed former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, whom he had worked closely with while the latter was BN chairman, for defending Perkasa's Datuk Ibrahim Ali over the Bible-burning issue.

Masing had said that he had lost all respect for the man he had once held in high esteem, adding that the former prime minister seemed to advocate that there was only one religion in Malaysia.

"I used to have the highest respect for Tun Mahathir. Now I have second thoughts on his wisdom.

"In the name of Islam, and in defence of the sanctity of Islam, anything goes now," Masing had said, referring to Dr Mahathir's comments in defending Malay rights group Perkasa and its call for Malay-language Bibles to be burned.

He had also hit out at Putrajaya for going on a sedition blitz against a number of politicians, academics, lawyers, a journalist, activists and a preacher.

When commenting on the sedition investigation against Edmund Bon, he had said that should the activist-lawyer be charged with sedition for stating legal facts, then the government "is a bit way out of line".

Besides that, the Sarawak minister flayed Putrajaya for threatening to throw pro-secession activists behind bars without listening to them.

He had said that even though their dissatisfaction with Malaysia was currently all talk, it would still be unwise of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to treat their unhappiness lightly.

"We must look at the complaints and do our best to remedy them if indeed they are justifiable," Masing had said.

Earlier in the year, Masing had also lambasted federal BN leaders whom, he said, were "gutless" for tip-toeing around the Allah issue with an unsound policy apparently aiming "to appease everyone".

"Leaders (in the federal cabinet) must be brave enough to take the bull by the horns

and decide once and for all which set of religious laws Malaysians must abide by."

He was exceptionally critical of the policy where Christians in the peninsula are banned from using the word Allah in their Bibles and religious publications in line with the Court of Appeal's ruling last October. The policy, however, exempted Christians in Sarawak and Sabah from the ban under a 10-point solution agreed to by the Federal Cabinet in 2011.

Today, Masing reiterated that this was proof that the element of religious extremism was beginning to creep in to Malaysia, and Sarawak was no exception.

"We don't have this problem here (Sarawak). We do not distinguish people according to their races. We look at a person as a friend.

"And we are a bit worried in Sarawak. That people from the West will start importing their rubbish here," he added.

He once again took a swipe at his BN colleagues, saying that they have stopped being self-critical and have grown to look at criticism as dissent while becoming increasingly arrogant.

"You must learn to be self-critical in order to grow. We make mistakes all the time. But we can improve if people point it out to us.

"A lot of BN people cannot accept criticism. They become ministers and then they think they are Gods and are above any reproach. That is the first downfall," he warned.

He attributed his love for BN as a reason behind his outspokenness on certain issues, saying that he wanted to turn BN from a coalition that was losing its relevance to one that would last another 50 years in power.

"I love BN. I want to make it better. Those who criticised me do not realise we are on the same boat. If the boat is leaking, I must say something, otherwise I would sink with them," he said.

He told The Malaysian Insider that this was how he was using his position as a minister in the state government constructively.

"If I was not in this position, who will care to listen to me? They will brush it off as the rantings of an old man.

"But because I am a minister, at least people stop and listen. At least, people bother to read my statements. And now I use it (ministerial position) to tell the world what Malaysia must do," he said. – November 4, 2014.

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