

Calling Najib 'national disgrace', youth says many too scared to criticise PM, Umno
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By Muzliza Mustafa

One of Asia's top debaters, Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, who raised eyebrows recently when he denounced Datuk Seri Najib Razak as a "national disgrace", said the remarks were the culmination of his views on several issues plaguing Najib's administration and leadership.

Citing the 1Malaysia Development Berhad scandal, the "misuse" of the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (Sosma), intimidation of the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission investigating a former 1MDB subsidiary as reasons for his remarks, Syed Saddiq said it was also on behalf of many too scared to speak out against the "unfairness".

"A lot of my friends in Umno are genuinely scared to speak up because they fear party discipline and that is terrible.

"It was not a knee-jerk reaction. It was also not the first time I voiced out my dissatisfaction. There were myriad of comments prior to that posting," he said of the post in October following the arrest of lawyer Matthias Chang under Sosma.

"When he (Najib) dodged comments on 1MDB, how Sosma was being misused, Cabinet members were silenced, party members were being strong-armed when they tried to speak up – these were the things that made me decide to post that posting," he told The Malaysian Insider.

Admitting he was once Najib's staunch supporter, the 22-year-old law student from Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) said the 1MDB debacle changed his mind.

"Before March, (when the 1MDB scandal became big) I was Najib's strong supporter. To me, he was the one credible leader whom I thought was doing a very good job for the nation."

He added that his respect for Najib was based on policies the prime minister had introduced, such as Pemandu (Performance Management and Delivery Unit), GTP (Government Transformation Programme) and GDP (Government Development Programme), as well as the move to rope in technocrats, such as Datuk Seri Idris Jala and Datuk Seri Wahid Omar.

"I was impressed. I followed his work and I was very supportive of all he did back then," said Syed Saddiq.

"It was he who once said to me when I received the Anugerah Perdana Belia Award from him, to continue to voice out for the rakyat no matter how inconvenient it is, no matter how difficult it is. That was what I was doing."

He also said Najib should step down if he was confident that he was not at fault in the 1MDB issue.

"Pass the baton to a transition minister. If he is innocent, he can get back into power. Even in South Africa and other developing nations, leaders would step down until investigation concluded, Datuk S. Ambiga said that as well."

In his October 8 Facebook post condemning Najib, he asked how much more Malaysians could take in light of Chang's arrest.

"First you unjustly and arbitrarily detain a politician. Now you're going after his lawyer as well?" he wrote, referring to the arrests of Chang and former Umno leader Datuk Seri Khairuddin Abu Hassan.

"Sosma was designed to detain terrorists who pose a direct threat to our national security, not to suppress dissenters!

"You expelled your vocal colleagues (former deputy prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and former minister Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal), you derailed the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), you arbitrarily dismissed the attorney-general (Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail). You interfered in MACC affairs through continuous intimidation.

"You suppressed news portals which unravelled the scandal, you quashed dissenters through a law intended for terrorists, you haven't sued foreign newspapers which you claimed that you would, the list continues...

"I guess you really do not care about the trust deficit which you're facing or the prospects of sinking Malaysia with you.

"In the end, it's all about you and not about Malaysia. That's a national disgrace. You are a national disgrace."

Although he has close affiliations with Umno and Putrajaya, having been appointed Perdana Fellow to Minister at the Prime Minister's office Nancy Shukri, and as a researcher at Bait Al Amanah, a local think-tank, Syed Saddiq is not an Umno member.

"My former boss (Nancy) called me when she found out about the posting. But she did not scold me. She respected my opinion on things," said Syed Saddiq.

Syed Saddiq left his job as special aide to Nancy at the end of August as he felt that it was the best thing to do considering that he was critical of happenings in the country, including the decisions made by the top leadership on certain issues.

"I do not want to get my ex-boss into trouble. When I wrote an open letter about the expulsion of deputy prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, she wasn't upset. She respected my point of view."

He said many people were worried what might happen to him if he continued to be vocal about the ruling government.

“My parents told me to wait till I finished my studies. They also asked me why I do this as I already have a good job. But I told myself, if I lose a job, I lose a job. I would like to feel that 10 years down the road, I will still be able to answer to my conscience.”

His posting slamming Najib resulted in many comments accusing him of being ungrateful for all the “benefits” he received from Barisan Nasional in nurturing him and his family.

“I am grateful. I am thankful for all the good things that were awarded to me but should I also be grateful for the wrong things that were done?”

He said being critical of the leadership has nothing to do with the party.

“Young people like me talk about issue-based politics. We are not taking sides and we are loyal to just one party.

“We might agree on the government’s implementation of GST (goods and services tax) but at the same time, we are opposed to others like the increase in toll rates, 1MDB scandal and so on,” he said.

The debater, who dreams of opening a public speaking and debate school in his home state Johor, also wants to be a politician someday.

He has set a five-year deadline to join politics and admits he has yet to decide on which party, adding that he will assess the political scenario and leaders first. – November 29, 2015.

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