



By G Vinod

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysians for (Teoh) Beng Hock movement has formed its own 'eminent' seven-member panel to monitor the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) investigating the death of Selangor political aide.

Named the RCI Watch Panel, the team comprises Bersih 2.0 chairman Ambiga Sreenivasan, Tenaganita director Irene Fernandez, Cultural Development Centre president Dr Toh Kin Woon, Malaysian Physicians for Social Responsibility president Dr Ronald McCoy, political scientist Wong Chin Huat, Penang state government legal advisory committee chairman Yeo Yang Poh, Universiti Malaya lecturer Azmi Sharom and Lim Len Geok (LLG).

Announcing its formation today, the movement said the RCI Watch Panel will provide comments

on the proceedings at www.teohbenghock.org website and will also submit a shadow report simultaneously with the RCI on April 25.

In 2009, Teoh was found dead at the MACC office in Plaza Masalam, Shah Alam. He was suspected to have fallen from the 14th floor of the building.

In January, an inquest into the death delivered an open verdict. The verdict led to a public outcry for justice which prompted Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak to form a royal commission.

Speaking to newsmen today, RCI Watch panel member, Fernandez said she was appalled that the government was trying to run away from its responsibility by using the Attorney-General's chambers to push for the suicide theory.

"Teoh died while he was under the care of a government institution (MACC). The government of the day must be held responsible for this," said Fernandez.

She also expressed concerns on the direction of the RCI, which she claims was leaning towards the suicide theory and did not want the commission to become a mere public relations stunt.

Fernandez added that the RCI should also look into reports where MACC officers had been accused of using torture to interrogate its witnesses.

“There were 59 complaints made against the MACC but no action was taken. If this is the case, there is no way we will have good governance and transparency,” she said.

Ambiga, on the other hand, commended the RCI for being participative in the inquiry and reprimanding errant MACC officers.

She was commenting on the March 10 probe where RCI chairman James Foong grilled MACC assistant enforcement officer Azman Alies for interrogating Teoh for long hours as the latter was merely a witness.

Cover-up

Ambiga, however did add that there appeared to be an attempt to cover-up what caused Teoh's untimely death.

"I am surprised that the police was not able to establish how he died, unless of course there is a cover up," said Ambiga who also criticised the delay in the investigation.

The delay, she said, had resulted in a lot of evidence pertaining to the case either gone, missing or even destroyed and this despite the inquiry being on-going.

She also urged the media to give a wider coverage of the proceedings.

Meanwhile Dr McCoy pointed out that there now exists a perception that there is no guarantee to a person's life when taken into custody by the authorities.

"That is why we have cases like A Kugan and Teoh dying while in custody.

"In 1998, they said Anwar Ibrahim's black-eye was self-inflicted and now they are saying Teoh committed suicide," he said.

In January 2009, Kugan was found dead while in police custody after being detained to assist in a case of luxury car theft.

A post-mortem report found that Kugan was beaten, starved and burnt with a hot iron.

In January this year, the Sessions Court acquitted constable V Navindran on charges of causing Kugan's death as the prosecution failed to establish a prima facie case.

In a reminder to Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, Toh said that there is no point talking about transforming the country into a high income economy without having straightened out public institutions.

"Everybody knows that investors will only invest in our country when they are confident of our public institutions.

"Without it, our nation will turn into a failed state,"he said.