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A tribute to Mak Minah

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Mak Minah Anggong was an accomplished ceremonial (asli) singer, musician, mother, grandmother and dam activist from Kampung Peretak. On Sept 21 last year Mak Minah, as she was fondly called, passed away in the Kuala Kubu Baru hospital where she was earlier admitted for aches and pains around the chest and back.

From my first meeting with Mak Minah early last year, she had impressed me with her exuberant nature, her childlike clarity, her willingness to speak the truth without fear, and the depth of her knowing.

Those who had the privilege of knowing her, whether for a short or long time, were charmed by her warm persona, and "fondness for the joget".

When she spoke to others about the loss of Temuan way of living and loss of ancestral lands and forests with the construction of the Sungai Selangor Dam, she often lamented them through her singing, whether in public performances of the Akar Umbi group where she was the lead, or in the village gathering. She was prepared to stand up to anyone who wants to destroy or steal her ancestral lands.

I remembered how she spoke to me about the relocation of the two Temuan communities to make way for the Selangor Dam, and her unyielding stand: "We don't want to be moved from our villages where we have stayed so long."

I remembered, too, how she experienced a deep sense of sorrow when she saw her fellow Temuans resettled at Sungai Tua as a result of the Batu Dam or those from Sepang resettled at Bukit Cheeding, "Look at how these people live, so congested and with no forests and rivers!"

Mak Minah's concerns - Orang Asli rights, lack of transparency and accountability of the Selangor state government, project holders and relevant authorities including the Department of Environment, Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli and Economic Planning Unit, safety of the proposed dam project, and inaccessibility to information related to the dam and the affected communities, among others, have never been provided with any answers.

The information, if any, is in bits and pieces. Yet the construction of the dam is already underway. The really sad thing is, the families living in Peretak and Gerachi have not been properly resettled. Where are the proposed resettlement and compensation schemes?

Construction vehicles of Syarikat Pengeluar Air Sungai Selangor (Splash), a consortium made up of the Sweet Water Alliance (40 percent), Gamuda (30 percent) and Kumpulan Darul Ehsan (30 percent) are zooming in and out. Quarry activities such as rock blasting have started.

Muddy future

Will the future of the two dam-affected Orang Asli community be as muddy as the tracks going through the village, the fishpond or the river due to the current operations going on?

Will the throats of the Save Our Sungai Selangor (SOS-Selangor) members and campaigners be as dry and dusty as the air in Kampung Gerachi especially where the exposed hills and construction vehicles are best sighted, from demanding for transparency and accountability of the Selangor state government, Splash and other authorities on the Selangor Dam?



Mak Minah's spirit is living right on top of a very steep hill - the first burial in the new cemetery chosen by Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli, which relatives and friends have named Bukit Minah. Since the past year, she has joined her dragon ancestors.

If their spirits are not let to rest in peace, as Mak Minah once told me, it is really a bad omen. Are the noisy excavation and construction

works happening in Kampung Gerachi toying with Temuan mystic tradition?

Pics by COLIN NICHOLAS - COAC (top) and ANTARES (below).

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