

BN invited to join Bersih in 'walk with rakyat'

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In response to a warning by Home Minister Hishammuddin not to hold a street demonstration, election watchdog Bersih 2.0 today clarified that the July 9 mammoth rally is purely a civil society's initiative and all BN component parties are invited to join in to demand free and fair elections.

"I can assure the minister and political parties that it is a civil society initiative and not the initiative of any political party," Bersih 2.0 chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan (second from left in photo) told a press conference today in Kuala Lumpur.

"We would like to invite all political parties, including BN and all NGOs, to join this rally, to walk with the rakyat."

The first announcement of a rally came from PAS central committee member Mohamad Sabu last Saturday, but Ambiga clarified today that PAS was informed about the initiative through a recent Bersih 2.0 meeting, which had invited representatives from few groups.

"We had a meeting with NGO and other groups including PAS because they have experience in organising such events," she explained.

'Minister don't understand us'

On the hostile response from Hishammuddin, who had described the rally as a move to create chaos and jeopardise Malaysia's international image, Ambiga called on ruling politicians to change their attitude toward peaceful rallies, which are a constitutional right.

"We'll not back off. It is July 9, it is going to happen," the former Bar Council president stressed.

Asked on the suggestion by Hishammuddin for demonstrations to be held in stadiums without the need to apply for police permits, Ambiga said her group is currently looking at all possibilities to hold the rally dubbed "Perhimpunan Rakyat" (People's assembly).

"We will consider all suggestions. We have not rejected anything."

Similarly, Maria Chin Abdullah, the executive director of rights group Empower and Bersih 2.0 committee member, said that the minister should not have issued a warning before understanding the coalition's intentions.

"It is not for him to say that we should have it in stadium because it is the right of the people to assemble peacefully," she added.

Won't apply for permit

Instead of applying for a police permit, Ambiga said the organiser will merely inform the police about the rally and expect them to cooperate.

Ambiga also explained that taking the streets was a "last resort" after failing to engage the authorities.

"I believe engagement is not working. Look at the alleged irregularities in Sarawak state election. Nobody wants to take action," she explained.

When a reporter pointed out that all the demands raised by Bersih in its first mega-rally in 2007 had been ignored by the government, Ambiga still remained optimistic that the coming rally would result in changes.

Bersih 2.0 will announce more details on the rally including time, venue and theme soon.

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