

**Bersih adamant on holding rally at Dataran
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Although the police and the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) have barred the use of the iconic Dataran Merdeka, Bersih is adamant on holding its protest there on Saturday.

"No other venue located outside central KL can offer similar convenience," Bersih co-chairpersons Ambiga Sreenevasan and A Samad Said said in a joint statement.

NONE Ambiga said Bersih would continue negotiating with the police and DBKL between now and Saturday to be given access to the square.

Samad reiterated that the venue would not be changed, as the location is strategic and accessible by various means of public transportation such as light rail transit, KTM Komuter and buses.

In addition, the historic square signifies nationhood and freedom and it is the appropriate place to express Bersih's demands for electoral reform.

It is also their constitutional right to gather at Dataran Merdeka, the national laureate noted.

Ambiga said Bersih is disappointed that the organisers are being given the run-around despite assurances by Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein that the coalition for clean and fair elections is not a threat.

"Yes we are extremely disappointed that DBKL does not allow us to gather at Dataran Merdeka, (when) other events (have been) held there in the past," she said.

"DBKL has offered us an alternative venue (at its) Cheras and Titiwangsa stadiums. One of these is located in a residential area.

"We do not know whether they are sincere, but after consulting with the rest of the NGOs comprising Bersih yesterday, we have decided to stick to Dataran Merdeka."

She said there is too little time to change the venue and that, even if there is a clampdown, the sit-in will be held at Dataran Merdeka.

"We believe the police can ensure the safety of the sit-down protest as was done on Feb 26, 2012 with Himpunan Hijau, and the Wanita Suara Perubahan event on March 18. Bersih will also have its own 6,000 security personnel to maintain the crowd," Ambiga said.

Hence, the people can turn up in numbers without worrying about their safety as there will be ample security.

"We also have 100 volunteer doctors ... arrangements are being made to ensure the participants' safety."

The Bersih 2.0 rally on July 9 last year had seen the death of Baharuddin Ahmad near Avenue K in Kuala Lumpur City Centre. An inquest is underway.

bersih announcing 3rd rally 040412 leafletThe Bersih secretariat also listed the gathering points for protestors, before they proceed to Dataran Merdeka.

These are at the National mosque, Masjid Jamek, Central Market, Masjid India, Brickfields and Jalan Sultan.

Apart from KL, similar rallies will be held in cities across the Malaysia and the world.

There are three demands for the Bersih 3.0 rally:

- * The Election Commission must resign;
- * The electoral process must be cleaned up before the next general election.
- * International observers should be allowed to monitor the polls.

‘Opposition will not hijack event’

Ambiga also gave an assurance that opposition parties, which are actively supporting the protest, will not be allowed to turn it into their event.

“We are barring political party flags, party t-shirts and other party memorabilia from being carried. There won’t be any chants or calls along party lines.

“This is a non-partisan event to ensure a clean electoral roll before the 13th general election is called.”

Incidents of political violence are escalating, she said. Although these are not part of the reforms, Ambiga said she hopes the authorities can also look into these.

Asked to comment on whether Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak would adhere to the call for reforms, and the possibility of elections being delayed till September, Ambiga said Bersih would consider calling off the rally but that this has come too late.

To another question on the Peaceful Assembly Bill which was gazetted yesterday, Ambiga said this will not stop the Bersih 3.0 rally.

“However, they just have to gazette it at this time,” she said in questioning the timing.

As with the run-around by the police and DBKL, she said this would only intensify public resentment.

Divine intervention

Samad called on people of all faiths to pray tomorrow and Friday, for the safty and success of the rally.

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He urged the people to gather at mosques, temples, churches and other places of worship to pray.

Perhaps divine intervention will help open the hearts and minds of the authorities to change, he said.

Activist and steering committee member Hishamuddin Rais (right) said the response to the rally has been very good as Bersih t-shirts are being sold by the thousands and this has created a new industry.

PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang, and Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng are among the opposition political leaders who have confirmed participation in the rally.

