

Ambiga: Why offer alternative at eleventh hour?

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By Andrew Ong

Electoral reforms pressure group Bersih cannot accept Kuala Lumpur City Hall's (DBKL) last-minute offer to have the Bersih 3.0 rally at Stadium Merdeka, just three days before the event.

The movement's co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan told Malaysiakini that DBKL knew well in advance about its intentions to use Dataran Merdeka for the rally this Saturday and could have made an offer much earlier.

"Even their first response to us in April 19 - which was a flat 'no' - did not contain any mention of an alternative venue," said Ambiga when contacted today.

Ambiga explained that although the movement had only officially notified DBKL about their plans on April 19, their intentions were widely known since the announcement on April 4.

NONEHad KL mayor Ahmad Fuad Ismail (right) made the Stadium Merdeka offer much earlier, Bersih would definitely consider it.

"It is a pity that Fuad chose to be caught up in bureaucracy or we could have resolved this," she said.

Ambiga said this when asked to respond to Fuad, who told a press conference that it was Bersih's fault if it feels that there was not enough time to change venue.

He said DBKL had received a formal notification only on April 19, stressing that his organisation must follow proper procedures.

Fuad added that Stadium Merdeka, where Independence was declared, was better equipped for such a gathering and is just as symbolic as Dataran Merdeka, where the Union Jack was lowered and replaced with the flag of the Federation of Malaya.

Logistical nightmare

When it was pointed out that it was possible to re-direct its supporters to Stadium Merdeka, which is just a kilometre away from Dataran Merdeka, Ambiga said this will pose a logistical problem.

"If we were to announce today that we switching venues just 72 hours ahead of the rally, people will be confused and uninformed.

"We explained to the mayor during the meeting this morning that he will have another problem because people will be in both places.

"Are they proposing that we turn the crowd around and ask them to walk to the stadium? I think that would be a bigger mess. If anything goes wrong, they will blame us.

NONE"We think it would be a logistical nightmare to change. A lot of people will be on the streets. Isn't this what they want to avoid?" said Ambiga.

On Fuad's claim that allowing the Bersih rally on Dataran Merdeka would result in him being accused of bias because he had denied similar demands by other groups such as Perkasa, Ambiga said this was a non-issue.

“They have allowed so many events to take place there. At the end of the day, who gets to use Dataran Merdeka is purely at DBKL’s discretion.

“It is a discretion that we are asking him to exercise in our favour,” said Ambiga, adding that Bersih still hopes for DBKL to reconsider its position.

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