

Do not underestimate Malaysians, says Ambiga

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By Hafiz Yatim

The Bersih 3.0 rally may be three weeks old, but for the organisers co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan it is still not too late to pay tribute to Malaysians for coming out in strength to show support.

Asked by Malaysiakini what had she learnt from the rally, Ambiga's quick response was do not underestimate Malaysians.

She said Bersih is not about herself, in reality it is a ground-up movement.

"It is not mine, it's not Pak Samad Said's. We did not pay for them to come, and in fact they paid on their own for the T-shirts and transport. Some designed them on their own. The people have taken ownership of Bersih.

"It just captured the imagination of the people. What I have learnt from Bersih 3.0 is that do not underestimate Malaysians. It was a far bigger crowd than we had anticipated and we have to learn to be better prepared.

"I have also learnt that the authorities can actually go berserk. I am still reeling from the extent of the violence and this is a government which is looking liberal and yet they do this.

"My fear is to what extent they are prepared to go to curb dissent. I'm a bit disquieted about that," she said.

Ambiga said the incident had deepened her faith in Malaysians, standing together in solidarity purely in support of each other is a wonderful thing.

In not taking credit for what had happened, the former Bar Council chairperson said Bersih had awakened and sparked off something positive in the people.

bersih 3 rally 180512 04 "We are not looking for differences but looking at unity for a common purpose (clean and fair elections). This is hard to fight back.

"They cannot fight this, and they should not fight as this is powerful stuff," she warned, though elections may be boring stuff for some.

Mind you, Ambiga said, the rally did not taken place only in Malaysia but in 80 other places worldwide, too, including people putting up the Bersih flag at the base camp of Mt Everest, and at Mount Kinabalu.

Eye on what comes first

She said Bersih's immediate task is not to organise Bersih 4.0 but to gather all those hurt at the rally to compile a report.

"I know people are pushing for another rally but we have unfinished business - violence in relation to the people, apart from voter education. We must bring justice to the people who were hurt," he said.

On the number hurt, she said the reports are being compiled and non-governmental organisation like Lawyers for Liberty and Suaram had recently sent a report that around a 100 had been injured to the Malaysia Human Rights Council (Suhakam).

abdul aziz spr ec chairman 300509 "We are hoping that Suhakam will hold an inquiry into police brutality. We owe it to the public for the facts to come out and let them out," she said.

Besides this, Ambiga said Bersih 3.0 is also pressing on with its efforts to seek the resignation of the Election Commission members.

The Bersih co-chairperson said she cannot understand the slow response to allegations that EC chairperson, Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof (right) and his deputy Wan Ahmad Wan Omar are Umno members.

Why EC should step down

"It is clear that we should know either they were or were not members and surely Umno should know. The response should've been immediate. Why is there such a fudging of the issue. There should be clarity whether they are members or not. There's no two ways about it, if they are members of a political party they cannot be EC chair and deputy," she said.

She said the July 9, Bersih 2.0 rally had seen the successful setting up of a parliamentary select committee (PSC) where many civil society groups have been calling for the liberalisation of certain legislation, and it is a good step for the government.

"But we have not seen the PSC report, and we do not think the recommendations cover Bersih 2.0's eight demands. Hence, we do not think the PSC has achieved its purpose."

On her views on several quarters, including former Kuala Lumpur CID chief Mat Zain Ibrahim, calling for a tribunal against Abdul Aziz and Wan Ahmad, she said Bersih would not go as far as that, all they want is for the two to leave and not only they but the rest of the EC members, too.

"The reason we are asking for their resignation is because the public has lost confidence in them but over and above all that is they are members of Umno They should resign," she said, adding they also want international observers for the 13th general election.

However, she commended the government for withdrawing the amendment to the Election

Offences Amendment Bill.

Demands left hanging

On how many of Bersih's demands had been met since the PSC was set up, Ambiga said out of eight only one and that, too, not completely - the indelible ink.

pulau ketam village head election 310711 indelible ink 02She said that indelible ink use had been gazetted but Bersih is still in the dark over how it would be applied whether the finger will be dipped in ink or only applied to it.

"As to the calls of free and fair media as pledged, I do not know how the press is going to transform overnight from being partisan to non-partisan.

"There is still the problem of the postal voters and this is being dealt with by Tindak Malaysia.

"In reality not many of our demands have been met," she said. She also referred to the issue of overseas voters, she could not understand why it cannot be implemented.

She noted that Indonesia has enfranchised its citizens abroad but not Malaysia.

When questioned, they shoot back who asked you to leave the country, Ambiga said, adding what they should do is make it worthwhile for them to return home.

"They really need a lesson on winning the hearts of the people," she said.

Ambiga disagreed with the notion that the Bersih protest represented a minority group as alleged by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

"Look, even if 10,000 people took a stand you have to listen. Are you saying because we are a minority our push for clean and fair elections is not legitimate.

"Look at our background, Malaysians had been brought up in fear and they stood up in Bersih 2.0.

"Bersih 3.0 is even bigger. The premier (says) he has a silent majority and I would say we also have a silent majority which did not come out just as theirs.

"These are really silly arguments. The very fact 250,000 came up, it is certainly something they should pay attention to and if they don't they would end up making a silly mistake," she said.

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