

## **40,000 for Bersih, 4,000 for red-shirts**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**Nov 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

As the curtain fell on the Bersih 5 and red-shirts' rallies, both sides attempted to paint a positive picture of their respective achievements.

But if the turnouts were to be a litmus test, Bersih 5 fell short of its reputation to mobilise massive numbers while the red-shirts turnout was only a fraction of its previous venture.

Former Bersih chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan, who had stepped up following the arrest of her successor Maria Chin Abdullah, had claimed a turnout of more than 100,000.

This was at Jalan Travers, which was cut off from the main group. However, journalists on the ground and photographs from the area indicated that the numbers were far less than that.

At its peak in KLCC, *Malaysiakini* estimated the turnout to be around 40,000.

The red-shirts, on the other hand, only managed 4,000 people at its peak, a pale comparison to the 45,000 it managed to mobilise last year.

KL police estimated the Bersih 5 crowd to be around 15,500 while the red-shirts was around 2,500.

With red-shirts leader Jamal Md Yunos arrested, it was hardly a serious counter demonstration, with only a couple of hundreds of protesters left by afternoon.

The lack of commitment was hardly a surprise as it was customary for a sizeable number of red-shirts protesters to be bussed in with food provided.

Umno was also more cautious in giving overt endorsement to the red-shirts this time, with party secretary-general Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor ordering party grassroots to revoke any instructions to mobilise for the red-shirts.

### **Lack of commitment**

Bersih is also not free from criticism over the supposed lack of seriousness or commitment.

The movement had in recent times been criticised for becoming too "carnival-like" with its core message seemingly drowned out by the sounds of vuvuzuelas.

The organisers had made it clear that the participants of Bersih 5 rally were to gather at Dataran Maybank in Bangsar and Masjid Negara before marching towards Dataran Merdeka.

But almost half of the Bersih protesters decided to 'parachute' directly to Dataran Merdeka

by taking the LRT to Masjid Jamek instead.

And when Bersih announced that the protest would relocate to KLCC, only a few thousand protesters decided to march from Masjid Jamek along Japan Ampang to their destination.

The vast majority once again hopped onto the LRT directly to KLCC, which saw the number of yellow protesters at the city centre swell rapidly.

### **PAS' absence notable**

The rally today also gave an indication about the ability of political parties to mobilise for a movement like Bersih.

Despite pledges by Amanah and Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Bersatu) to mobilise large crowds, particularly the Malay community, this did not materialise.

However, there were notably more Malays compared to Bersih 4 but the numbers were still dismal.

This once again proves that PAS is instrumental in mobilising the rural heartland.

The Anti-GST May Day rally in 2014, with the backing of PAS and other opposition parties witnessed similar numbers outside KLCC without Bersih's name to it.

More than two years later, a two-month long campaign to mobilise, including Bersih's roadshows in the rural heartlands, was not able to top the mobilisation compared to when there was a united opposition.

Furthermore, Malaysians have also been suffering from political fatigue, and it cannot be discounted that the threats by the red-shirts could have discouraged many from turning up.

However, the government should not make the mistake of thinking that the turnout is an indication of the voting trend as there are those who prefer to register their dissatisfaction through the ballot box rather than on the streets.