

No gun to anyone's head, Bersih 2.0 tells EC chief
The Malaysian Insider
August 19, 2011
By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 19 — Bersih 2.0 today laughed off the Election Commission (EC) chief's remark it had put a gun to his head in pushing for electoral reforms.

Maria Chin Abdullah, who is a part of the reform group's steering committee, said it was only putting pressure because its requests to clean up the election process had been ignored all these years.

"We are not so violent as to put a gun to anyone's head," Maria (picture) told The Malaysian Insider in an immediate response to EC chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof's description of Bersih 2.0's actions.

"We need to ensure our demands are put forward," she said, adding that its suggestions for more transparent elections had been raised even before the July 9 rally in the city.

"If there's no response, what do you expect people to do? We can't just keep quiet," she said.

She said the coalition of 62 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had been asking the authority to act and prevent election fraud for years, but had been repeatedly ignored.

The movement has shortlisted eight immediate measures, including more frequent updates of the electoral roll, the use of indelible ink to prevent voter fraud and an extension of the campaign period to a minimum 21 days.

Maria, who heads another civil society called Empower, urged the EC to stop treating Bersih 2.0 like the enemy, and recognise its efforts as legitimate attempts to help the democratisation process in Malaysia.

"They have to do that first. They have to stop calling us illegitimate," she said.

Abdul Aziz had earlier told reporters Bersih 2.0's demands to the EC were like putting a gun to his head.

"I told them better don't do that (put a gun to his head). You can suggest anything but some suggestions we might agree, some suggestions we might not. But don't expect we must agree everything," Abdul Aziz said today.

He was speaking to reporters here at the EC office after a two-hour discussion with the Association for the Promotion of Human Rights (Proham).

The first NGO to meet with the EC since the July 9 Bersih rally, Proham today submitted a report on "Human Rights and Electoral Reform" based on its findings from a public forum last month.

"You must come like Proham today, we must discuss openly without condition; they (Proham) didn't put a gun to my head," he said.

Maria said the EC has yet to contact Bersih 2.0 directly to discuss talks despite having

already mentioned their intention to do so in the media.

The election watchdog group has been pushing for electoral reforms for years, resulting in two street rallies — the first in 2007, which has been partly credited for the Election 2008 tsunami, and the second on July 9 this year, which saw the Najib administration's reformist image take a severe beating in the international media.

Prime Minister Datukl Seri Najib had announced on Tuesday it would form a bipartisan panel, answerable to Parliament, to review the electoral process.

Bersih had suggested the parliamentary select committee push for a royal commission of inquiry (RCI) on electoral reforms in Malaysia, saying that the "terms of reference" for the commission should be drawn up by the committee within a year after its formation.

The Malaysian Insider

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