

Bersih says vindicated by new poll
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 — Bersih 2.0 has said it had expected the overwhelming two-thirds support for free and fair elections published by a local research house yesterday, adding it was inspired to ramp up its campaign to educate Malaysians nationwide on polls ahead of the 13th general election.

The electoral watchdog's chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan (picture) said she had expected the overwhelming support from Malaysians polled by the Merdeka Center and published yesterday.

"That accords with our stand and the reason for that is because our demands are so wholly reasonable," she told The Malaysian Insider.

But the lawyer disputed the pollster's analysis that "Malays were also the only group where more agreed with the way the Najib administration handled Bersih than not, with 53 per cent saying they were satisfied with how the government reacted to the rally".

Ambiga's fellow Bersih 2.0 steering committee member, Maria Chin Abdullah, however, seemed to sport a different view when she said the Merdeka Center poll finding was a "fair observation of Malaysians' view of electoral reform".

"We definitely need to do more work to reach out to those out of town and in the rural areas, not just to Malays. It's an indication for Bersih. We don't think our demands have reached out to every city in Malaysia, for example, Sabah and Sarawak," Chin said.

The head of Empower, a non-government linked group to Bersih 2.0, said the committee will also unroll a new programme to attract more support after the week-long Hari Raya-National Day twin festivities.

Chin also told The Malaysian Insider it had drawn up its strategies to promote its eight demands to free up the electoral process but will only announce them later.

She however, was overjoyed at the positive response from ordinary Malaysians towards the 62-member coalition, which the Home Ministry had outlawed last month.

"We need people from every state," she said.

Thousands of Bersih supporters flooded the streets of the capital on July 9 to demand for free and fair elections after talks between the election watchdog and the government broke down.

This was despite an unprecedented intervention by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, who called on both sides to reach an amicable solution for the sake of national stability.

Bersih has demanded that Putrajaya execute eight electoral reforms before the next general election, expected to be called soon.

The survey by the Merdeka Center of 1,027 randomly selected registered voters aged 21

and above was carried out between August 11 and 27.

Over two-thirds of Malaysians agree with the demands mooted by Bersih 2.0 while close to half disagreed with the way Putrajaya handled the July 9 rally and the events leading up to it, the latest Merdeka Center poll results showed.

Seventy per cent agreed that foreign observers should be allowed to monitor elections while 68 per cent felt opposition parties should be given access to government-owned television and radio stations for at least one hour a day.

Support for foreign observers and greater opposition access to media were strongest among the Chinese (74 per cent and 84 per cent, respectively) while Indians were most likely to agree to the use of indelible ink (83 per cent).

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