

Bersih flexes green muscle
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 4 — Electoral reforms group Bersih is now lending its influence to other civil society efforts, beginning with an environmental rally in Kuantan this weekend.

The Green Gathering is spearheaded by residents there against Australian miner Lynas Corp's under construction RM700 million rare earth plant, located in the nearby Gebeng industrial zone.

But the main draw of the Sunday dawn assembly will be Bersih leaders including Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan (picture), the chairman of the movement who has been celebrated with honorary doctorates and awards including France's highest honour, the Chevalier de Legion d'Honneur (Knight of the Legion of Honour).

"We are lending our support because we believe in the principle of voters deciding their own destiny. Since the July 9 rally, civil society has been energised and we want to lend our clout and credibility to them," Bersih steering committee member Wong Chin Huat told The Malaysian Insider.

Ambiga had led tens of thousands of demonstrators who poured into the capital three months ago in defiance of a government ban and police action to call for free and fair elections.

Although nearly 1,700 were arrested, scores injured and one ex-soldier died, international condemnation of Putrajaya's clampdown led Datuk Seri Najib Razak to announce in August a parliamentary select committee on electoral reforms.

The steering committee for the Green Gathering told a press conference in the Parliament today that it expected "more than 10,000" to turn up this weekend on the back of Ambiga's promised attendance.

It said that the support of Bersih and also Kuantan MP Fuziah Salleh, who has led protests against the Lynas plant which has raised fears of radiation pollution, shows "environmental issues are gaining momentum."

The Green Assembly is also jointly organised by residents in various locations nationwide who are also protesting against alleged environmental hazards.

This includes gold processing in Bukit Koman, Raub that locals say will lead to cyanide poisoning and an incinerator in Cameron Highlands.