

Bersih keeps momentum alive with overseas campaign

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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23 — Bersih 2.0 will step up its fight for electoral reforms next week when chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan goes on a back-to-back visit to four of the most renowned law universities in Australia where she will meet Malaysian students to highlight the various problems plaguing the country's electoral system.

The Malaysian Insider understands that the respected lawyer has been scheduled to deliver a public lecture hosted by the Asian Law Centre at the University of Melbourne, followed by public appearances at the University of New South Wales and the University of Sydney (October 31) and the Law Faculty of the Australian National University in Canberra on November 1.

It is understood the events will also allow overseas Malaysians who have yet to register as voters a chance to do so.

"Campaigns to register Malaysians as voters have picked up steam in Australia. Bersih 2.0 and the ugly events that transpired in Kuala Lumpur on July 9 have inspired Malaysians living overseas in ways that we could only have imagined before.

"Hundreds of Malaysians gathered in solidarity with Bersih 2.0 in 7 Australian cities with over 700 in Melbourne and 400 in Sydney," said David Teoh, national coordinator for both Bersih 2.0 Australia and the Australian chapter for Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia Australia (SABMoz).

Ambiga's (picture) appearance in Australia next week is expected to put pressure in Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who will also be in the western Australia city of Perth on October 28 to attend the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

"This visit by Ambiga will serve to remind the Australian government and its citizens that a close regional neighbour and trading partner administers a system that willfully denies hundreds of thousands of Malaysians the right to vote from abroad," Teoh told The Malaysian Insider via email.

He said the main purpose for next week's events is to remind the Malaysian government of the need to implement promised electoral reforms before the 13th general elections.

Last July 9th's Bersih rally in Kuala Lumpur saw international participation from Malaysians in different parts of the world, including Australia, New Zealand, England and the US.

Bersih has claimed some 50,000 people took part in the street demonstration but official police figures placed the number closer to 6,000. Close to 1,700 people were arrested, scores were injured and an ex-soldier died in the street rally.

The government disclosed in Parliament this month it had spent RM2 million and deployed 11,000 police to handle the rally, and has since formed a bipartisan parliamentary select committee to look into electoral improvements including cleaning up the electoral roll.

The committee also chose to adopt Bersih's eight demands, one of which was for the electoral roll to be cleaned up. The PSC comprises five BN lawmakers, three from PR and one Independent MP.

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