

Despite tension, Ambiga presses Bersih 2.0's points at PSC
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 12 — Amid a highly-charged atmosphere, Bersih 2.0 chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan managed to put forward the electoral watchdog's reform proposals to a parliamentary polls review panel with minimum fuss.

The coalition of 62 civil societies had been outlawed by the Home Ministry last July for allegedly posing a national security threat in demanding the government hold cleaner and more transparent elections.

The highly vocal Ambiga caused a stir earlier today when she insisted on speaking as the head of Bersih 2.0, which now encompasses 80 different organisations, and earned the disapproval of panel chairman, Datuk Seri Maximus Ongkili.

Among the requests highlighted by Ambiga today was automatic voter registration once those eligible to vote turn 21. — file pic
Ongkili had previously stated she would only be allowed to speak as an individual and not as Bersih chief, but appeared to cave in under the much-decorated civil rights activist's unflinching gaze, and allowed not only Ambiga but four of her colleagues to speak for two hours.

Among the requests stressed upon by Ambiga was automatic voter registration once those eligible to vote turn 21.

"When there is automatic voter registration, all you're doing is making it easier for those eligible to vote to become voters.

"At the moment, we have 3.7 million unregistered voters, [it] is not acceptable and if we look at the rate at which the EC is registering, they can't catch up," she said.

The former Malaysian Bar president also suggested using the biometric system to identify voters; adopting indelible ink to prevent multiple voting; as well as placing international observers to monitor elections.

"If you want to engender trust in the system, and you want to assure the people that everything is well, then one of the ways to do it is to bring in international observers.

"In fact, indelible ink and international observers will allow people to have trust in the system again," she told the nine-man panel.

Among the 14 groups and individuals at today's public hearing were the Association for the Promotion of Human Rights (Proham), Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam), PAS Youth, DAP Socialist Youth (Dapsy) and the Bar Council.

The issue of postal voting rights, especially for ordinary Malaysians overseas, was also brought up several times during the seven-hour-long public hearing today.

The current laws allow civil servants and their spouses, as well as full-time students and their spouses to register as postal voters.

The bipartisan Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) deputy chairman Datuk Seri Mohd Radzi Sheikh Ahmad told reporters that the next public hearing will be on November 25 for two days in Kota Kinabalu, followed by Kuching, Penang, Kota Bharu, and Johor Baru.

In the wake of the Bersih 2.0 rally, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak promised to reform the country's election process, a key demand of Bersih 2.0, before going on to announce sweeping changes to security and press laws, a move that he said was to increase civil liberties in the country.

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