

Bersih: Delay polls until all reforms met
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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, March 23 — The general election must be delayed until all of Bersih 2.0's electoral reforms demands are implemented, its president Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said today.

"Most of these reforms can be implemented within a few months. Who says we don't have time? Is there something they know that we don't?"

"Hold off polls until reforms are met. We still have until next year, there is still time," Ambiga (picture) told The Malaysian Insider.

Her remarks were a response to Datuk Seri Maximus Ongkili who said yesterday that the Parliamentary Select Committee on electoral improvements could not meet all of Bersih's demands as some matters required a longer-term solution.

The panel chairman told reporters only six of the eight demands by the coalition of 62 NGOs will be addressed in the panel's report which, he said, was likely to be ready by the end of next week.

He said certain issues required new legislation, which must be passed by Parliament over time.

But Ambiga said that this was "disappointing", and that most of the reforms should already have already been implemented last year.

"I do not see which requires legislative amendments. It has been six months, they (the government) should have come up with something.

"If they can't do it, let civil society do it," she said, citing the example of the use of indelible ink which only required a regulation amendment.

One of the biggest concerns, said Ambiga, was the state of the current electoral roll, and that there have been reports of alleged tampering.

She asked whether Ongkili's remarks meant that the electoral roll would not be cleaned up in time for the next general election.

"Say it then, explicitly. Are they going to the next general election without cleaning up the roll?"

"You don't need a legislative amendment for it, all you need is a courageous Election Commission (EC)," added Ambiga.

Most of these reforms can be implemented within a few months. Who says we don't have time? Is there something they know that we don't?

She said Bersih would wait for the PSC's report to Parliament which is due on April 2, and see what the government would do in response to the report before taking "further action."

The electoral reform movement had warned last week it will hold a third mass rally due to lagging polls reform and more reports of electoral fraud recently.

Bersih has said its eight demands are the bare minimum that must be done before an election that must be called by May next year.

Ambiga told The Malaysian Insider last week "a long time" has passed since the July 9, 2011 rally but Malaysians have yet to see significant electoral reforms implemented.

The bipartisan PSC panel was formed last year to address concerns over the country's election system after the Najib administration drew international condemnation for its handling of the Bersih 2.0 rally.

Tens of thousands took to the streets on July 9 last year to join Bersih 2.0's rally for free and fair elections but were dispersed by police in chaotic scenes that saw over 1,500 arrested, scores injured and the death of an ex-soldier.

Under pressure, the government then promised a slew of reform measures, which included the formation of the select committee and the enactment of the highly-criticised Peaceful Assembly Act last year.

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