

**Stop us and lose votes, Bersih tells Najib**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 4 — Election watchdog Bersih 2.0 predicted today a massive voter backlash for the Najib administration if it cracks down on the April 28 rally at Dataran Merdeka.

Pointing to international condemnation of the crackdown against Bersih's rally last year, the group's co-chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said a similar outcome was likely if the government again used a high-handed approach to stop the planned gathering.

"Absolutely. Which is precisely why I am assuming that sensible advisers of the prime minister will tell him to refrain from using the same tactics," she told a press conference at the Kuala Lumpur Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (KLSCAH) this afternoon.

She was responding to a question on whether a huge voter backlash could be expected for the Barisan Nasional (BN) government if it employed the same methods to stop Bersih's rally as it did last year.

The coalition of 84 non-governmental organisations earlier today confirmed April 28 as the date for "Bersih 3.0", its third rally for free and fair elections, which will go on from 2pm to 4pm at Dataran Merdeka.

But this time, the gathering will also be joined by simultaneous events across the country, likely adding pressure to the government to accede to the group's demand for a total reform to the country's election processes.

Bersih's previous rally on July 9, 2011 turned chaotic when the authorities employed huge teams of riot police, armed with water cannons and tear gas launchers, to disperse the crowd of thousands.

The crowd had converged on the streets of the capital from the early hours of July 9, defying earlier warnings that their participation could result in arrests.

Over 1,600 people were detained as a result, including Ambiga and scores of opposition lawmakers, but Bersih 2.0 later declared the event a success based on the number of participants and the publicity it had earned in both local and international media.

The government moved quickly to enact the Peaceful Assembly Act after the event and formed the parliamentary select committee (PSC) for electoral reforms but Bersih 2.0 has still maintained that these moves were insufficient.

Among others, Ambiga pointed out today that the PSC's 22 recommendations, which were just approved by the Dewan Rakyat yesterday, had failed to deal with specific discrepancies in the electoral roll.

These include duplicate voters, overly large numbers of voters registered to a single address, the existence of deceased voters and a suspicious spike in the number of civilian and postal voters among many other similar irregularities.

The former Bar Council chairman also noted that the PSC had not only failed to address issues surrounding election offences and dirty politics, but had also not expressly directed the Election Commission (EC) to implement all 22 reform recommendations in time for the 13th general election.

She said today it was Bersih's hope that national polls are not called anytime soon, in order to give the government enough time to implement the reforms.

But when asked if the group would order a boycott of the polls should reforms fail, Ambiga adamantly said: "No".

"That is the worst idea. We would never call for a boycott of the elections.

"We want 100 per cent voter turnout," she replied.

Bersih's first rally in 2007, also for free and fair elections, has been widely credited for the 2008 political tsunami which saw Barisan Nasional (BN) lose its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority.

The ruling coalition faced a stunning defeat in four states and one federal territory, and the historic event led to the formation of Pakatan Rakyat (PR), a loose pact comprising the DAP, PKR and PAS parties.

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