

Bersih to rally at Dataran Merdeka even without DBKL nod
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 15 — Bersih 2.0 will “soon” inform Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) of its April 28 rally plan at Dataran Merdeka but added that it would proceed to use the venue even if refused permission.

“If they do not allow us to use Dataran Merdeka, we will still gather there, or try to get as close as possible to the area,” Bersih 2.0 steering committee member Wong Chin Huat told The Malaysian Insider today.

But Wong remained optimistic that they would receive approval from the city hall, adding that anything otherwise was a sign that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was a “hypocrite” who had “lost control of DBKL”.

“Let’s put it this way — DBKL is part of the federal government, and we’re counting on Najib to be a responsible leader who is responsive to the wants of the public,” he said.

He added that he was sure DBKL was already aware of Bersih 2.0’s plans to use Dataran Merdeka for its coming April 28 rally, and the application would merely be a formality.

The Malaysian Insider reported previously that Bersih 2.0 had acknowledged Putrajaya’s advice for it to seek permission from DBKL for its rally.

But the election watchdog’s co-chair, Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan, stressed to The Malaysian Insider that the permit application should merely be a matter of formality as Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein has already said the rally could proceed.

The group said it selected Dataran Merdeka as a venue for Bersih 3.0 due to its historical relevance to the people’s struggle for Independence and a democratic Malaysia.

The iconic Dataran Merdeka, or “independence square”, where the Malayan flag was hoisted for the first time after independence, had long belonged to the Royal Selangor Club before it was taken back by DBKL in 1987.

According the City Hall’s website, DBKL is the authority responsible for managing and maintaining the square.

Bersih 2.0’s July 9 rally last year had saw thousands throng the capital city’s streets to march for free and fair elections during a time when gatherings were still deemed illegal without permit from the authorities.

At about midday, riot police fired tear gas and chemical-laced water to disperse protesters who had assembled for an otherwise peaceful event calling for electoral reform.

The clampdown drew negative publicity for the Najib administration in the foreign media, and was seen as the catalyst for a series of reforms announced by the government.

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