

**Bersih rally at Dataran Merdeka illegal, says Nazri**  
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**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 4 — The government insisted today Bersih's planned "sit-in" at Dataran Merdeka on April 28 is illegal despite its pledge to allow public gatherings according to international norms.

Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz told reporters in Parliament today the historic square, where the Malayan flag was hoisted for the first time after independence, is not a lawful gathering point under the recently passed Peaceful Assembly Act.

"Dataran Merdeka has not been gazetted as an area for peaceful gatherings," the de facto law minister (picture) said.

Election reforms movement Bersih confirmed today it will hold its third rally for free and fair elections on April 28.

Co-chairman Datuk A. Samad Said said "Bersih 3.0" was necessary to warn Malaysians that the country is about to face its "dirtiest" polls to date.

The 84-member coalition said it was disappointed by the parliamentary select committee on electoral reforms that was formed following the July 9, 2011 rally for free and fair elections which saw tens of thousands flood into the streets of the capital.

Datuk Seri Najib Razak's administration was widely condemned for a clampdown on the demonstration where police fired water cannon and tear gas into crowds in chaotic scenes which resulted in over 1,500 arrested, scores injured and the death of an ex-soldier.

The prime minister then announced a raft of reforms to give Malaysians more freedom including allowing public gatherings based on international norms while taking a firm stand against street demonstrations.

But the Peaceful Assembly Bill that was tabled in Parliament drew condemnation from the opposition and civil society for being more repressive than existing regulations.

Bersih chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan had said it was "shameful that Burma can propose a more democratic law," referring to Myanmar's military-dominated Parliament which passed a law last year allowing citizens to protest peacefully with five days notice, instead of the 10 required here.

The Peaceful Assembly Act states that the home minister may gazette "designated places of assembly" where organisers need not notify authorities in advance of a planned rally.

But gatherings can be held anywhere outside a 50m radius of a prohibited place as long as police are given 10 days' advance notice.

The list of prohibited places includes dams, reservoirs, water catchment areas, water treatment plants, electricity generating stations, petrol stations, hospitals, fire stations, airports, railways, land public transport terminals, ports, canals, docks, wharves, piers, bridges, marinas, places of worship and kindergartens and schools.

St Mary's Cathedral is just under 50m north of the square, across Jalan Raja

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