

Bersih to hold third rally on April 28 21
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 4 — Election watchdog group Bersih 2.0 confirmed today it will hold its third rally for free and fair elections on April 28. This time, the rally, which will go on from 2pm to 4pm at Dataran Merdeka, will include simultaneous protests at various venues in the peninsula and east Malaysia, as well as across the globe.

At a press conference to announce the rally here, Bersih 2.0 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 soft-spoken national laureate said, this time, the rally should draw at least 500,000 people as it will be held at several locations nationwide and across the globe.

"When I walk anywhere, people would call me and ask me when (the rally will be held). From that interaction, the many emails, meetings and through Facebook, I predict that there will be at least 500,000 people this time," he told the packed room at the Kuala Lumpur Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (KLSCAH).

He expressed the 84-member coalition's disappointment over the parliamentary select committee's (PSC) 22-point electoral reforms proposal, saying that despite the Najib administration's repeated assurances and promises, the panel had failed to introduce meaningful reforms to the election system.

"Neither the government nor the PSC appears to have taken a serious view of the many allegations of fraud. Both have glossed over the disenfranchisement of so many citizens both overseas and within Malaysia.

"Many of the other matters that so many Malaysians have painstakingly and diligently presented to the PSC have not been comprehensively considered," the white-haired Samad Said said, reading from a statement in Malay.

He demanded the resignation of the entire Election Commission (EC) over their alleged disregard to reform the polls processes, earning applause from around him.

"The EC has failed in its responsibility, and lost the confidence of the public. They must resign," he firmly said.

Samad Said added that Malaysians must voice their disappointment with the government and the EC and protest against continuing fraud and the "obvious lack of commitment" from the authorities to implement reforms in time for the coming 13th general election.

"As such, Bersih 2.0 will gather, sit and protest in a peaceful manner across the nation and around the world.

"This is to express our deep disappointment with a government that continues to

manipulate the electoral system to their advantage," he announced.

"Bersih 2.0, comprising 84 non-governmental organisations, call upon Malaysian citizens wherever they are who love this country to participate in this sit-in.

"It will be a time for reflection by all Malaysians, particularly those in power, as to the kind of legacy and future we intend to leave to the next generation.

"This is Bersih 3.0," he said.

The PSC's final 22-point report was tabled in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday and was approved without debate after opposition lawmakers refused to accept the Speaker's decision to reject the inclusion of a minority report to the panel's final findings.

The minority report was to record the views and assertions by the panel's three Pakatan Rakyat (PR) members, who had rejected four of the 22 recommendations issued in the report.

Also speaking at the press conference, Bersih 2.0 co-chairman Datuk S. Ambiga said the coming rally would focus on three key issues - that the EC should resign; the election process must be reformed before the 13th general election; and that international observers should be invited to monitor the polls.

She added that the coalition would be sending weekly reports to the Human Rights Council in Geneva to keep them updated on the event, particularly to draw focus to any event of human rights abuses that may occur before or during the April 28 event.

"We want to keep them aware on how Bersih 3.0 will be handled," she said.

Ambiga, who was arrested during the last rally, said the iconic Dataran Merdeka is not scheduled to host any other event on April 28 and should be available for the event.

She said the coalition was looking forward to discussing the event with the police and any government authority to ensure that the protest would run smoothly and without any violence.

"Security is our top priority," she said, adding that she hoped the police would offer help to keep participants in check.

"Any kind of aggression will not be tolerated. We will be the first to hand over culprits to the police, you can be assured of that," the former Bar Council president said.

Bersih 3.0 will make the same eight demands as its second instalment last July 9, including : cleaning of the electoral roll, reforms to postal voting, the use of indelible ink, free and fair access to media, a minimum 21-day campaign period, the strengthening of public institutions, a stop to political corruption, and an end to "dirty" politics.

Bersih 2.0's last rally on July 9 had drawn a crowd of thousands to the streets of the capital, despite the government's earlier warning that participants would be arrested.

Opposition lawmakers and Bersih leaders had promised the gathering would stay peaceful but chaos had broken out at midday when riot police used tear gas canisters and chemical-laced water to disperse protestors.

The government's high-handed approach in cracking down on the rally had earned it

widespread criticism in the foreign media, leading to the Najib administration's decision to enact the Peaceful Assembly Act to regulate future public gatherings.

The PSC was later mooted in October last year as a part of Datuk Seri Najib Razak's pledge to reform the election process.

After 13 meetings, six public hearings and one fact-finding mission to several countries abroad, the bipartisan nine-member panel finally completed its findings on Monday and tabled it to Parliament yesterday.

But to Bersih 2.0 and PR lawmakers, the 22 recommendations had fallen far short of their expectations as it had not touched on specific issues of manipulation in the voter registry and failed to offer a commitment that the reforms would be implemented in time for the coming election.

Among others, Ambiga said today that the PSC report had not made any mention of election offences and stopping dirty politics, which are among Bersih 2.0's key demands.

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