

Bersih 3.0 necessary as only one reform demand met, says Mat Sabu
The Malaysian Insider
April 5, 2012
By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, April 5 — Mohamad Sabu today defended Bersih's planned April 28 rally at Dataran Merdeka, claiming that the government had yet to address all of the group's reform demands.

The PAS deputy president said that the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on electoral reforms had only "successfully" addressed one of Bersih's eight demands, and that this was insufficient.

"Out of the eight demands, only one has been addressed, which is the use of indelible ink.

"The other demands have been ignored, our main concern is especially the voter registration list," Mohamad (picture), who is popularly known as Mat Sabu, told reporters.

Election Commission (EC) deputy chairman Datuk Wira Wan Ahmad Wan Omar had earlier today described Bersih's planned April 28 rally as "hasty and rash."

He said Bersih should have instead accepted the 22-point recommendations presented by the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on electoral reforms and allow the commission to study the recommendations first. He questioned Bersih's rationale in having a third rally, and pointed out that the EC itself has yet to issue a response to the PSC's findings.

"He does not need to comment on this issue. He is a government officer," said Mohamad in response.

He said that PAS would mobilise "thousands" of its members and supporters to turn up for the rally, but did not a specific number.

When asked whether Bersih 3.0 would be peaceful, Mohamad said the matter was up to the police.

"We abide by the rules, we will be peaceful if there is no provocation.

"If you throw tear gas, we'll even run to a pig barn (kandang babi), but if you don't provoke, it will be alright."

Bersih yesterday 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 Bersih chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan 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 PSC for electoral reforms, but Bersih 2.0 maintains that these moves were insufficient.

Ambiga yesterday pointed out that the PSC's 22 recommendations 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 also did not expressly direct the EC to implement all 22 reform recommendations in time for the 13th general election.

She said 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.

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

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

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Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/bersih-3.0-necessary-as-only-one-reform-demand-met-says-mat-sabu/>