

Bersih 'hand delivers' letters to City Hall, police over April 28 protest
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 19 — Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan has confirmed that Bersih 2.0 has "hand delivered" letters to the police and Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL), notifying both parties of its plan to use Dataran Merdeka here for its sit-in protest next Saturday.

The election watchdog's co-chair told The Malaysian Insider that the hand delivery comes following media reports quoting KL mayor Datuk Seri Ahmad Fuad Ismail as saying that he had not received any letter from the group on the protest.

"We faxed it on Monday evening but he said he has not received. So we have decided to send both letters — to DBKL and to the police — by hand," she said, adding that the letters were despatched by hand yesterday.

Ambiga (picture) said that should either party contact Bersih 2.0 for a face-to-face meeting ahead of the rally, she was ready to accede.

Bersih 2.0 steering committee member Wong Chin Huat had told The Malaysian Insider over the weekend that the group plans to go ahead with the protest at Dataran Merdeka even if DBKL refuses to grant permission to use the venue.

"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," he had told this news portal.

But Wong remained optimistic that it would receive approval from 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 Razak 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 group has said it had selected Dataran Merdeka as the 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 by DBKL in 1987.

According to 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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