

PAS orders mobilisation for Bersih 3.0
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 19 — PAS's national leadership has instructed all members and supporters to attend the Bersih 3.0 sit-in protest next Saturday, in a major boost for the electoral reform protest movement dismissed earlier today as having very little traction with the public.

The Pakatan Rakyat (PR) party's secretary-general Datuk Mustafa Ali said today that the party's machinery has been directed to mobilise support among members to take part in the protest scheduled to be held at Dataran Merdeka here.

Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said earlier today the April 28 rally did not pose a security threat to the nation, adding that the civil rights movement's demands had gained little traction with the public.

"April 28 is not an issue," he told reporters.

He appeared to suggest that the federal government has accommodated the group's demands on electoral issues through a Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) set up last year, the repeal of the Internal Security Act (ISA) and even addressed public fears as to radioactive hazards on the Lynas rare earth project in Pahang.

Hishammuddin also described the organisers and participants of the Bersih rally as "irresponsible".

Since the government pushed through the Peaceful Assembly Act this year, the authorities have been reluctant to take a hardline approach in cracking down on public demonstrations.

Earlier this year, thousands of activists and residents were allowed to mass in Kuantan to protest against the Lynas rare earth plant.

Anti-rare earth activists have said they will join next Saturday's Bersih protest.

But it is the support of PAS that is likely to guarantee a big turnout at next Saturday's rally which has taken on a more significant meaning because of looming elections.

Electoral reform group Bersih's rally next Saturday is a sequel to its mammoth rally on July 9 last year to raise greater attention to its causes ahead of the 13th general election, widely expected to be called soon ahead of its expiry next March.

Last year, thousands thronged 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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