

Umno Youth's 'Patriot' opts out of Bersih 3.0
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 26 — Umno Youth's "Patriot" movement will not take to the streets this Saturday to counter Bersih 3.0, its chief Khairy Jamaluddin has said.

"No, not this time," the fiery youth leader told reporters last night, after participating in a debate with Bersih co-chair Datuk Ambiga Sreenivasan here.

Khairy makes a point at the debate on April 25, 2012. He said his 'Patriot' movement will give Bersih's rally on Saturday a miss. — Picture by Jack Ooi
But while he said he "respects" the group's right to stage its protest, he continuously insisted that their reasons to rally have been "misrepresented" by the group's leaders.

Khairy had led his group of some 150 "Patriots" last July 9 in a counter-rally against Bersih 2.0's second march for free and fair elections on the streets of the capital.

But the youth leader found himself caught in the middle of the chemical bombardment that riot police rained down on protestors and was later arrested when the event went into full swing.

His arrest slowly saw the "Patriot" movement fizzle out and disperse even as Bersih's crowd of thousands continued with their march.

This year, Bersih expects an even bigger crowd to throng the city for its "sit-in" protest, owing to the government's alleged failure to reform the election system.

The government has this time allowed the event but is clashing with the election watchdog over its chosen venue — Dataran Merdeka.

Khairy urged Ambiga last night to "give in a little" over the venue for Bersih 3.0, pointing out that the authorities have already offered suitable alternatives to iconic square.

"By all means, go out. But why only Dataran Merdeka?"

"We offered Stadium Merdeka... Last year, that was where you wanted it, I don't know why it is different this year," he told Ambiga when winding up his debate.

The Rembau MP then reminded the civil society leader that her struggle was not about Dataran Merdeka but for "free and fair elections".

In her response, Ambiga acknowledged KL City Hall's offer to use Stadium Merdeka but said it had come at too short a notice.

She said it would be difficult to change the event venue just days before the planned rally

this Saturday.

“It is impossible... you will have people in Dataran Merdeka and in Stadium Merdeka,” she said.

City Hall and the Home Ministry have both rejected Bersih’s plan to use the iconic independence square for its rally this weekend, insisting that it move the event to other more suitable locations.

Bersih had last year pushed for Stadium Merdeka but its application had come at a time when such public gatherings were still deemed illegal.

Since its July 9 rally however, the government has enacted the Peaceful Assembly Act, which allows for such assemblies without the need for a police permit.

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