

Putrajaya sues Bersih 2.0 over April 28 rally
The Malaysian Insider
May 23 , 2012
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 23 — The federal government is suing the steering committee of Bersih 2.0 for alleged damages amounting to RM122,000 that were incurred during the April 28 rally organised by the electoral reform movement.

The 10 Bersih leaders, spearheaded by Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan are the first persons to be sued for damages under the Peaceful Assembly Act, less than a month after the new law aimed at allowing public gatherings "in accordance with international norms" was enforced.

"Today, at about 3.25 pm, I was served with a writ and statement of claim whereby the government of Malaysia is claiming damages against me and members of the steering committee for losses purportedly suffered by them in connection with Bersih 3," Ambiga, the former Bar Council president said.

A copy of the writ of summons sent to *The Malaysian Insider* said the government was suing Bersih under Section 6(2)(g) of the law which states that organisers must "ensure that the assembly will not endanger health or cause damage to property or the environment."

"The plaintiff charges that the defendants failed to carry out their statutory responsibility when the assembly went out of control and turned into a riot, causing damage to vehicles owned by the plaintiff," the writ said.

The statement of claims lists 15 vehicles, mostly belonging to the police, that had to be repaired at a cost of RM122,000.

The government also wants general damages, interest and a declaration that Bersih breached Section 6(2)(g).

The action comes after PKR de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, deputy president Azmin Ali and Rembau chief Badrul Hisham Shaharin were yesterday charged with taking part in the April 28 Bersih 3.0 rally under section 4(2)(c) of the Peaceful Assembly Act.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said when tabling the law in Parliament last year that it would be "revolutionary" and allow Malaysians to participate in public gatherings "in accordance with international norms."

The case is set for mention on June 13 before Kuala Lumpur High Court judge Justice Prasad Sandosham Abraham.

The April 28 rally that saw tens of thousands gather at six different locations before heading to Dataran Merdeka was peaceful until about 2.30pm when Ambiga asked the crowd to disperse.

But her announcement was not heard by most of the crowd who persisted to linger around the historic square which the court had already barred to the public over the weekend.

Just before 3pm, some protestors breached the barricade surrounding the landmark, leading police to disperse the crowd with tear gas and water cannons.

Police then continued to pursue rally-goers down several streets amid chaotic scenes which saw violence from both sides over the next four hours.

Several dozen demonstrators have claimed that they were assaulted by groups of over 10 policemen at a time and visual evidence appears to back their claim but police also point to violence from rally-goers who also attacked a police car.

The police car then crashed into a building before some protestors flipped it on its side.

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