

Bersih to snub Hanif-led probe panel
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, May 30 — Bersih has joined the Bar Council in refusing to participate in the “Hanif panel” investigating police violence in the April 28 rally for electoral reforms, saying the probe would be “seriously flawed” under Tun Hanif Omar’s chairmanship.

Bersih co-chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan repeated the council’s view that Hanif’s involvement in the panel, following the latter’s criticism of Bersih 3.0 protesters as communist sympathisers, would affect the impartiality of the investigation.

“Our stand has not changed. It is not personal, we have nothing personal against Tun Hanif but we think it is seriously flawed as he is chairing it (the panel).

“Justice must be seen to be done and he has already made a pronouncement about Bersih in a negative light, so we think he should not even be there (in the panel), let alone to chair it,” she told The Malaysian Insider yesterday.

Following the Bersih 3.0 sit-in on April 28, Hanif alleged that communist sympathisers had participated in the rally and agreed with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak’s claim that the demonstration was an attempt to oust the present government.

Despite his views, Hanif was later appointed to lead Putrajaya’s six-man investigation panel on allegations of widespread police violence during the rally.

Ambiga also took the same view as the Bar Council on the legal standing of the panel, which she said could not be compared with the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam).

She also pointed out that Suhakam was already conducting its own inquiry into Bersih 3.0, and it was not necessary to duplicate the process of investigation.

“And what powers does this (independent) panel have? What is its legal standing? Since Suhakam has said they will hold an inquiry, this is where we (Bersih) will be concentrating our efforts,” she said.

Hanif said on Monday that he was willing to meet the Bar Council as well as Bersih leaders as part of the panel’s investigation, adding that he wanted the inquiry team to be given a chance to carry out its duties without “suspicion” from any parties.

“With regards to concerns that there may be several parties like the Bar Council and Bersih who are unco-operative, I would like to state that the panel is only an alternative channel for those who want to co-operate willingly.

“I am prepared to meet the Bar Council or any other parties, including going to their office, for (everyone’s) mutual benefit,” Hanif had said in a statement.

Bar Council vice-president Christopher Leong told The Malaysian Insider yesterday that the council would not participate in the panel’s investigation, saying it was pointless to do so when Suhakam was also conducting its own probe.

"We do not see the purpose to duplicate the process... we already said earlier that we would participate in Suhakam's inquiry. There is no public purpose served by duplicating the enquiry process," he said.

The Najib administration had formed a bi-partisan parliamentary select committee for electoral reforms after Bersih 2.0 last July, which agreed on 22 recommendations for the Election Commission (EC).

But Bersih and opposition parties had argued the recommendations do not cover cleaning up the electoral rolls to prevent fraud and the alleged existence of "phantom voters".

Despite complaints of gerrymandering over the years, the nascent opposition pact Pakatan Rakyat (PR) won 82 federal seats and five state governments in Election 2008, which Barisan Nasional said was proof of clean and fair elections.

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