

**Ambiga: Government declaring 'war' on polls reform with anti-Bersih flyers**  
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**By Debra Chong**

KUALA LUMPUR, July 10 — Putrajaya has declared "war" on Malaysians keen for electoral reform, Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said today after several anti-Bersih flyers bearing the Information, Communication and Culture Ministry's official logo were found in the backseat of a taxi.

The prominent lawyer-activist had sent out pictures of leaflets purportedly distributed by the government to taxi drivers that paint the electoral reform movement as "pengacau" (rabble-rousers) despite two ongoing public inquiries into the chaotic April 28 rally in the capital city.

"I'm surprised and appalled by the continuing attempts to demonise Bersih. It is improper in view of the ongoing inquiries, both Suhakam's and their own.

"It looks like the government has declared war on Bersih. That means they are effectively declaring war on the rakyat," she told The Malaysian Insider over the phone.

The former Malaysian Bar president, who heads Bersih with national laureate Datuk A. Samad Said, said she found the leaflet objectionable because it presented a lopsided take on the events that took place.

The flyer featured photographs of Bersih supporters dressed in the signature yellow T-shirts attacking police vehicles on one side, with the words "Hidup Biar Beradab Bukan Biadap!" (Live Civilised, Not Like Savages!).

On the flipside, the flyer stated: "Fikir-fikirlah dan jangan meyokong kumpulan pengacau yang degil dan jangan diperalatkan." (Think carefully and don't support stubborn rabble-rousing groups and don't be manipulated).

Ambiga lambasted the Najib administration for leaving out all mention of the authorities' use of extreme measures against the demonstrators, evidence of which has also been recorded.

"The leaflets are wholly misleading and an irresponsible act," she said.

She said she believed there were some policemen on duty that day who had handled matters professionally, but added there were groups that had targeted Bersih supporters and assaulted them.

"I think we cannot deny and they cannot deny, by their own disclosure, 960 canisters of tear gas were fired into the crowd. To me, that is violence.

"Why is there no mention of this?" she asked.

She added that the leaflets were likely produced using public funds.

She also questioned the timing of its distribution.

The back of the leaflet. — Picture courtesy of Ambiga Sreenevasan

Judging from the publication code printed on the lower half of the page, the leaflets have been in circulation since May this year as part of a public awareness campaign.

On July 5, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had launched a government programme touting taxi drivers as the country's "ambassadors", saying they could help boost the country's image through their daily interaction with tourists.

"If taxi drivers are polite, courteous and customer-friendly, speak good things about the country and show a positive attitude, tourists will feel welcomed.

"Tourists meet thousands of taxi drivers and through their interactions, tourists' perception of Malaysia is formed," he was reported as saying by The Star newspaper at the launch of the Taxi Tourism Ambassadors programme in Putrajaya.

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 Bersih chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan asked the crowd to disperse.

But her announcement was not heard by most of the crowd who continued to linger around the historic square, which the courts 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 attacked a police car.

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

Najib has weighed in on the April 28 rally and labelled it an attempt to overthrow his democratically-elected government.

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