

**JASA's booklet dishonest propaganda, Bersih says
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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 3 — Bersih 2.0 has slammed the Department of Special Affairs (JASA)'s criticism of the electoral reform group's sit-in protest last year as "propaganda" that is "dishonest and reckless".

Chinese-language daily Sin Chew reported yesterday that JASA's booklet titled "Panduan Penjelasan Isu Semasa (Guide Explaining Current Affairs)" had accused the Bersih 3.0 rally of being an opposition plot.

Bersih 2.0 steering committee member Maria Chin Abdullah **(picture, right)** bluntly called the booklet prepared by JASA's Panel Pemikir as "propaganda".

"The report was issued last year — just after Bersih 3.0. It is obvious that such propaganda has not any effect on Malaysians as 112 happened," she said, referring to the Himpunan Kebangkitan Rakyat (People's Uprising Rally), or 112 rally, which went on peacefully here on January 12.

"As a government agency, it has failed to understand its nonpartisan role but became a mouthpiece spewing out lies," she added.

An agency under the Information, Communications and Culture Ministry, JASA is headed by Datuk Fuad Hassan, who was a two-term Umno state assemblyman for Ulu Klang.

Bersih co-chair Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan **(picture, bottom left)** said the 322-page booklet, which was reportedly distributed free to the public, is an abuse of taxpayers' money.

"Not only is the booklet a blatant abuse of taxpayers' money, the contents are dishonest and reckless," she wrote in a text message to *The Malaysian Insider*.

The former Bar Council president said Bersih 2.0's claims of electoral fraud have been proven right by testimonies given at the hearings of the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) on Sabah's illegal immigrants problem.

"This appears to be a 2012 publication and the public can see for itself from the Sabah RCI and the daily reports of people being registered without their knowledge that what Bersih has been claiming is absolutely true. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding," the lawyer said.

She also weighed in on the "wild" claim in the booklet where it was reportedly stated that some rally participants had purportedly admitted that they were paid RM100 each to show up and provided with three days' food and accommodation.

"As to the wild claim of payment of 100 Ringgit to participants, they should stop judging others by their own conduct and standards. In fact, most supporters had to pay out money to buy a T shirt and pay for transport and food!" Ambiga said.

Maria also contrasted the 112 rally which was peaceful to the end and the aftermath of the Bersih 3.0 rally last year.

"At 112, people continue to express themselves in the streets & this time round the police behaved & conducted their role & responsibilities.

"This showed that police could have controlled the violence at Bersih 3.0 but not only failed to do so but contributed to violence by having officers without tags to beat up the participants," she alleged.

Last April, the peaceful sit-in protest in the nation's capital ended in chaos, with the police using tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowd, after rally participants allegedly breached the barricades around Dataran Merdeka.

Maria further said that it was "mischievous" for Sin Chew to report on the booklet which was listed on JASA's official website as being published last year.

"It is very mischievous of Sin Chew to bring up this booklet again when it's last years news. What is the intention of such a well known media?" she asked in a text message to *The Malaysian Insider*.

Maria defended polls watchdog Bersih 2.0, after JASA had claimed in the booklet that the former's eight demands were politically motivated and had nothing to do with electoral reform.

"Jasa has also failed to understand the agenda of Bersih 2.0 as we are asking for electoral reform & clean & fair elections. This is part of democracy that not only Bersih 2.0 is asking for but also Malaysians who are no longer fearful to demand for their right & votes to be protected. At this coming election it's important that people come out to vote wisely," Maria wrote.

In the booklet prepared by JASA's Panel Pemikir, a question-and-answer section on the Bersih 3.0 rally last April appeared to attack the gathering for electoral reform.

"Bersih 3.0 rally's true purpose is the opposition's plot, [an] attempt to attack the image of the Election Commission and the government led by Prime Minister Najib; the eight demands have a political purpose and have no connection with the reform of Malaysia's election," Sin Chew yesterday quoted the booklet, which was published in the Malay language.

Bersih had pushed for its eight demands to be fulfilled in order to have free and fair elections, including the call for a clean electoral roll.

According to Sin Chew, one of the 17 answers on Bersih stated that the rally in Kuala Lumpur only attracted 25,000 participants, which contrasts with Bersih co-chair Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan's alleged statement before the rally that 300,000 were expected to turn up.

Sin Chew reported that the booklet, which also promotes the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government's concepts such as 1 Malaysia, covers 22 current affairs issues, including hot topics such as the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) scandal, the Lynas rare earth plant, Sabah's illegal immigrants and the purchase of Scorpene submarines.

In the booklet's preface, JASA's head reportedly said the publication was intended to help the public understand the true situation, saying that some issues have been twisted by irresponsible groups.

Also included in the booklet is a disclaimer stating that the views published do not necessarily reflect the agency's stand.

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