

**Bersih will hold you to your integrity pledge, Ambiga tells Najib, BN
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By Md Izwan**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 – Bersih 2.0 will hold Datuk Seri Najib Razak to his integrity pledge on free and fair polls, Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said today, adding her own assurance that the polls watchdog has no plans to change the government using violent demonstrations.

The Bersih co-chairman (picture) commended Naib and Barisan Nasional (BN) politicians for stepping up to the plate by signing Transparency International Malaysia's (TI-M) integrity pledge but reminded them not to turn it into an empty promise.

"It is a good thing and a positive sign that he (Najib) signed the integrity pledge. But he must be reminded that we will hold him to that promise," she warned.

"We will observe every day whether or not they adhere to what they sign," she told a Loyar Buruk forum on "Constitutional reform for a new democracy: Free and fair elections".

The well-known lawyer and civil rights activist also urged Najib to stop political violence to prove his administration is serious about ensuring the coming election would be handled fairly.

"For a start, he (Najib) must openly condemn and reject any form of political violence. This would be a good start for him and it is not difficult," she added.

Ambiga and her fellow steering committee members in the Bersih 2.0 coalition have been pushing the government to play a more active role in stamping out what they call "political violence", which include threats against the lives of politicians, violent clashes during ceramahs and racially-charged disputes.

In recent months, the country has heard a stream of reports of such incidences, including the recent threat by Perkasa to burn Malay-language bibles that contain the word "Allah". When asked if she felt that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) politicians should follow in Najib and BN's footsteps by signing the same integrity pledge, Ambiga agreed.

But she stressed that with or without the pledge, both sides should observe the rules of integrity during the polls.

"Yes, I feel it would be good for anyone to follow. But look here, it does not matter whether you sign it or not... you should have integrity.

"The pledge is just for comfort's sake... whether or not PR signs it, we expect them to behave well too," she said.

Ambiga also deflected criticisms against Bersih 2.0 during the session, insisting that the movement has only peaceful motives to seek change in accordance with provisions in the Constitution.

She offered that Bersih 2.0 would never sanction or organise violent gatherings with the intention to topple the government in an undemocratic manner.

Ambiga rejected references linking the group to the "Arab Spring", saying Malaysia's situation was far different in terms of culture and other factors.

"Bersih is a peaceful movement and we would not change the government by way of street protest.

"I'm sorry, ours is a different situation from the Arab," she added, when replying to a critic from the audience who accused Bersih 2.0 of attempting to affect drastic regime changes in Malaysia.

Najib, the BN chairman and other component party members had this Wednesday signed the TI-M's Elections Integrity Pledge, in a bid to show the coalition's commitment to transparency during Election 2013.

The pledge was introduced as part of the graft watchdog's campaign to promote clean elections amid allegations of vote-rigging and widespread bribery during polls. The opposition has accused BN of maintaining its grip on power through such tactics.

Late last year the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's (MACC) Consultation and Corruption Prevention Panel chief Datuk Johan Jaafar proposed that the government make it compulsory for all political parties to submit their list of candidates to the commission for vetting to ensure that they were 'clean' besides avoiding any undesired allegations.

Najib, also the prime minister, threw his backing behind the suggestion by announcing last Friday that all BN candidates for the next general election must be vetted and cleared by the graftbusters.

The idea, however, met resistance from opposition leaders who said the MACC had no jurisdiction to vet potential BN candidates before the general elections which must be held before mid-year.

Leaders from the federal opposition coalition PR insisted that only a public declaration of assets would be the best way to ensure candidates are not corrupt.

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