

Street protests may be only way to push for polls reform, says Ambiga
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By Syed Jaymal Zahiid

KUALA LUMPUR, June 14 — Polls reform group Bersih 2.0 has conceded that taking to the streets could be the only way left to fight for polls reform should its campaign to clean up the election system through legal channels fail.

Co-chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said the group, however, will first use its “People’s Tribunal” as the chief platform to “scrutinise” the allegations of fraud committed in Election 2013 where its findings will be the basis for its advocacy work for polls reform.

“We will go with the tribunal first. Depending on the findings we will push for relevant reform. If that fails then a protest may be the only option,” she told The Malaysian Insider.

Ambiga had previously said that the “people’s tribunal” will serve as a “moral force” to investigate and publicly expose alleged fraud in the May 5 general election.

The tribunal and its findings will also underpin its fight for the resignation of all the present Election Commission (EC) line-up following accusations of bias. Bersih and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders have also made this a key condition to bilateral talks on polls reform.

But the Najib administration’s insistence on the EC’s independence means it is unlikely to agree to the condition. The EC chairman, Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Yusof, has also said that the commission will not bow down to pressure.

The impasse could well force Bersih and the opposition to resort to street protests as a last recourse.

“Our fight for electoral reform will continue. Our People’s Tribunal will proceed,” Ambiga said.

Bersih has held three massive street protests in the past. The violent clampdown on the demonstrations, especially the third rally, drew widespread domestic and international condemnation on the Najib administration which later forced it to set up a parliamentary panel to oversee polls reform.

Although the move initially gave hope for constructive dialogue on electoral reform, Putrajaya’s failure to implement most of the recommendations made by the panel prompted Bersih and the opposition to revive the fight to clean up the election system.

The campaign intensified after the EC was accused of rigging the May 5 ballot to give the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition a win.

Ambiga noted that the EC have failed to defend itself and explain the massive irregularities uncovered during the intensely fought Election 2013 including its failure to administer the indelible ink system to prevent double voting and inaction on the tainted integrity of the electoral roll.

“As far as I am concerned the EC does not enjoy public confidence. They have failed to act independently and they have failed in executing the indelible ink process effectively.

"The importance of that process cannot be underestimated. It was a recommendation of the PSC (parliamentary select committee) and it was introduced to avoid double voting," she said.

The opposition has filed more than 30 election petitions to challenge some of the election results. It has also filed several civil suits in a bid to impeach the EC line-up and prevent them from conducting the constituency redelineation exercise by year-end.

Unbalanced constituencies and lopsided redrawing are seen as key factors to BN's dominance while the ruling coalition is seen benefiting every time a redelineation exercise is held, academics have noted.

"This EC should not be allowed to carry out the redelineation exercise.

"They propose to do it on the present electoral roll which requires serious cleaning up. They have thus far shown no inclination to do that," Ambiga said.

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