Is Bersih 3.0 justified?

Pros and cons of Bersih 3.0

Political analysts and academicians divided over motives of rally organisers

IS holding a third Bersih rally justified, or simply overkill?

The announcement by the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (Bersih 2.0) yesterday, that they would hold yet another rally to demand for electoral reforms has triggered a gamut of emotions and split opinion right down the middle.

Bersih 2.0 co-chairperson Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan announced that the April 28 rally will go ahead, claiming that the Parliamentary Select Committee’s (PSC) audit of the electoral roll was incomplete, and had not addressed issues related to postal voting, election offences and measures to end dirty politics.

The decision to hold the rally at Dataran Merdeka has been slammed by de facto Law Minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz, who said it wasn’t a gazetted area for peaceful assembly. Police said that the location would be unsuitable as it would disrupt the peace. (See accompanying stories)

Political analysts meanwhile, were divided over the motives behind the rally.

Describing the rally as ‘over-
kill”, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia’s Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Assoc Prof Dr Mohammad Agus Yusoff said the organisers should bring it up with the PSC than take to the streets.

“There’s no need for a Bersih 3.0. It’s overkill. Give the recommendations a chance. If the Bersih 3.0 committee is not happy with what PSC had given to the Election Commission, (it should) organise a meeting with PSC and discuss it with them.”

Universiti Sains Malaysia Social Sciences Deputy Dean Dr P. Sivamurugan said that the committee should give the PSC recommendations a chance if they are genuine about election reforms.

“Although the PSC may not have included all the suggestions from Bersih 2.0, they should at least give due recognition to PSC’s suggestions, which is a step forward for the administration,” he said.

Sivamurugan also raised doubts over Bersih 3.0’s motive for the gathering.

“The organisers will, of course, get the crowd, based on traditional support. However, they will also use it to attract fence-sitters. There will be questions on whether Bersih is merely using the demonstration to measure support for the Opposition. “If they are sincere in pushing for a reform, they must remain non-partisan,” he said.

However, Monash University professor of political science and head of school Dr James Chin said the rally was justified as the PSC had failed to address two main grouses faced by voters.

“The first deals with illegal phantom voters and the second is gerrymandering (due to re-delineation exercises),” he said.

“This has ensured that the government of the day remains in power; there is no choice but to rally” he said.

He believed that if the rally is successful, it could prompt the government to delay the general election, widely touted to occur this year.

Universiti Malaya Law Professor Dr Azmi Sharom reiterated Chin’s opinions, saying that the PSC had failed to deal with “serious issues” like the citizenship-for-votes issues and cleaning of the electoral roll.

However, he said, the question remains if many Malaysians will join the rally.

“Malaysians are aware of the issues and are just as concerned, but whether or not they take to the streets is another question because Malaysians are lazy,” he said.

He also said that the rally’s success will not impede the Government’s decision to hold the GE, this year, as it is “pushed in a corner”.

He said that the uncertain global economic outlook would be a necessary condition for delaying the GE.

The first Bersih rally in 2007 drew an estimated 20,000 while the Bersih 2.0 rally, which occurred on July 9, last year, drew some 5,000 participants.

The Bersih 2.0 rally is widely perceived to have compelled the government to form a PSC on electoral reforms.