

# Malaysia: Ambiga anticipates another Bersih rally as it celebrates 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary

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**Former Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan said she is anticipating a fresh rally to protest against dishonest and corrupt political leaders.**

This comes as Covid-19 restrictions are gradually lifted.

“Be ready to put on your shoes and walk the streets. Because honestly, that time may be closer than you think.

“It is time for us to demand better leaders. Enough of giving in to leaders who are dishonest and corrupt. It’s not okay.

“We cannot stand here and say the flaws, some of them criminal in nature, in the leadership is okay. It’s time we spoke loudly again,” she said at the electoral reform group’s 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in Petaling Jaya today.

The organisation has held five major rallies in the past to protest against corruption and call for electoral reform, but the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent movement control order (MCO) have forced Bersih to conduct its activities virtually.

## **Past and present leaders**

Ambiga was speaking at the event alongside other former and current leaders of Bersih, as the election watchdog unveiled a new logo for the organisation that was designed by artist Fahmi Reza.

It also dropped the “2.0” from its name as part of the rebranding, which was added in 2010 to differentiate it from the original Bersih founded by politicians when the group was taken over by civil society activists.

It contended that the differentiation is no longer necessary since it is now clear to all that Bersih is an independent and nonpartisan organisation.

Speaking at the event, Bersih chairperson Thomas Fann reminisced about the organisation’s 15-year journey and said it has accomplished a lot despite many challenges.

“We have been caught and sent to the police station many times. It’s been a hard journey, it’s been a long journey, but it was worth it, and there is still a long way to go.

“Even if the political landscape has changed, Bersih wants to stay relevant and play a pivotal role in the changes that are coming,” Fann said.

He cited the success of holding a large peaceful assembly in 2016 and the first transition of power at

the federal government level in 2018 where Bersih played a role.

He added that the Sheraton Move and the subsequent political defections have exposed problems with the political system in the country.

### **New ideas**

Fann revealed that Bersih has been working to introduce new political ideas and concepts to the country to find a solution to the problem and end those practices.

“We have introduced the idea of recall elections to deal with the problem of party hopping.

“Because we cannot go on this way, where there is impunity, no consequences, and incentives such as money, positions, and freedom from prosecutions built into the system for party hopping,” he said.

There were a total of eight changes of government in the country since GE14 due to party hopping, two of them occurred at the federal level in [2020](#) and [this year](#), while the rest involved state governments in [Johor](#), [Perak](#), [Kedah](#), [Sabah](#), and [Malacca](#) which experienced it [twice](#).

Fann’s predecessor, former Bersih chairperson Maria Chin Abdullah was also at the event and said now as a politician, she looks forward to continuing working with the organisation to push for political reforms in the country.

“(Bersih) was a journey that I won’t mind repeating again. I’ve learned a lot through my journey at Bersih, in the sense that the connection with the people, what they want, and I’ve been able to apply a lot of them in my constituency works.

“For that, I am very grateful to Bersih for all the lessons learnt. Congratulations again and I really look forward to working closely with Bersih to continue our whole journey of reform,” the PKR Petaling Jaya MP said.

### **Educating the public**

Former acting chairperson Shahrul Aman said there is still a lot to be done in terms of educating the public on political reform, and Bersih alongside its movement needs new blood to pass on the torch.

“We cannot let the country go downhill, there’s still a lot to be done on public literacy and changing values.

“Who has to do it? We have to do it, and we need to find new friends, new people, new blood to steer the country ahead.

“What got us here may not bring us to what we want to achieve,” he added.

During the anniversary celebration, Bersih also launched a new book titled “Bersih: A Journey to Democratic Breakthrough”.

In a press release after the event, the group said Bersih has succeeded in instilling an understanding of the importance of democracy among Malaysians through its work, and it can be reflected in the tens of thousands of people showing up at rallies organised by Bersih.

“Fifteen years after fighting on the streets and in consultation rooms to demand that electoral reform and institutional reform be an important national agenda, it is still a long journey for Bersih

and all Malaysians.

“We seek support, guidance and encouragement from Malaysians to continue to lead this movement in the face of challenges and hopes in order to create a Malaysia that is fair, just, independent and upholds the dignity of the people,” it added.

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