



Bersih Paris: 60 turn out despite heavy rain



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12:15PM Apr 30, 2012

Despite the heavy spring downpour in Paris, the Bersih rally on Saturday commanded a better than expected turnout.

About 60 people comprising those of Malaysian, French, Singapore, China, Iran and other nationalities attended the rally, held in tandem with gatherings in Malaysia for clean and fair elections.



Most of the protesters were from Paris, but some had travelled from Lille, Grenoble and even Toulouse for the event.

The rally was held at the Jardin du Trocadero from noon local time and ended about 5pm.

It was preceded by a picnic in the park overlooking the famous Eiffel Tower, during which the protestors got to know each other.

The rally started with the group singing *Negaraku* and chants of "Bersih!"

Some protestors carried placards with messages like 'I love my country, does my country love me?' and 'Where is my future?'



Those present distributed flyers to the public, took photographs and even managed to sing a joyful 'Rasa Sayang'.

Some students from a local theatre school performed a sketch of puppets highlighting Bersih's eight electoral

demands.

Co-organiser Dr Selva Pillai said there is a huge difference between the actions of the police in Malaysia and France.

"Here (France), the police were neutral and practised impartiality. Our permit was approved easily with no exaggerated rules and regulations," she said.

Selva, an ex-civil servant, said the police provided protection and "gave us an assurance that they will remove people who intimidate us".

She said it is heart breaking to see fellow Malaysians being treated badly just for exercising their civil rights.

"As Malaysians overseas, where we have the freedom to (protest), we must and should exercise this freedom for the people at home to know that our democracy is failing," she added.

Co-organiser Charis Quay agreed that, since Malaysians overseas have the opportunity to protest and express their concerns, it is their duty to do so.

"In the hour of need, we have to join fellow Malaysians to help the country," she said.

Reasons for protest

A participant, Mohd Zhafran Mat Jusoh, said he is unhappy with the way that elections are conducted in Malaysia.

"They (government) use whatever method to win. And the people need to raise their voice because the leaders are taking us for granted," he said.



A nuclear safety engineer, he said he does not care who wins an election, so long as it is won by clean and fair means.

He also said the problem of 'phantom' voters should be identified and dealt with by the Election Commission (EC).

"I have never registered as a voter and I have been abroad for the past nine years. But when I checked online, my name has been registered as a voter. Someone must have been voting on my account," he said.

Malaysians living or working abroad should have the opportunity to vote, he added.

Another participant, Sean Rubis from Kuching, said he was supporting the cause because the voting system has deteriorated in Malaysia.

"Accessibility to voting stations is a big problem in Sarawak. A lot of indigenous people cannot vote because (polling stations are) too far away and they do not have transport to get there," he said.

In addition, many of the voters have a low level of education in terms of their voting rights, he said.

"The EC should have done a better job in providing transportation and education for these voters," he pointed out.

A telecommunication engineer, Vijay Balasegaram, who is based in Grenoble, said he would like to see postal votes being reinstated for expatriates.

"Although I am abroad, I still want to exercise my right to vote," he said.

Elections, he said, make up the fundamentals of a government, so it is time that the EC cleans up its act.

"I want a country where my children can grow up knowing that their votes count for something," he said.

Tan May Ling, a game designer, said Bersih is a cause close to heart.

"I always wanted to be part of Bersih and to help towards (clean) and fair elections. I am a registered voter, but I cannot vote just because I am not in the country," she said.

This does not make sense, she said, explaining she is only out of the country because she cannot find a job in Malaysia, due to the specialised field of games development.

A chemical engineer from Lille, Nelson Kan, has been living in



Europe for the past five years.



He said that change is in order for the betterment of Malaysia and that "we need a fair election, we need a change".

Quay, a lecturer at a public university in Paris, claimed that her goal is not just for the next general election.

"It is good that the government changes from time to time but the next general election is not the focus. We have to look at the long term, where changing of government is a sign of healthy democracy," she explained.

She said it is more important that the voters are mature and educated about their right to vote.

"My greatest fear for Malaysia is that we might have two, three or even more candidates to chose from, but all are bad choices," she said.

She hopes that she will have a hard time choosing a candidate at some point in the future, because of the high level of maturity, efficiency and standard of Malaysian politicians.

"That would be the happiest day of my life," she added.

CHRISTINE CHAN, a former *Malaysiakini* journalist, currently lives in Paris.

Do you have photographs or video clips depicting police brutality during Bersih 3.0? Let us help you share them with *Malaysiakini* readers. Contact us here: photo@malaysiakini.com