

Bersih, Bar Council **snub** Hanif panel

> Ambiga rejects request to assist in probe

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PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Bar and the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) have turned down invitations to meet the government-appointed independent advisory panel on the Bersih 3.0 rally.

In what could be seen as a direct snub, the Bar Council and Bersih 2.0 steering committee co-chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan had rejected the panel's request to testify and assist the panel in its probe into the April 28 rally.

Bar Council president Lim Chee Wee, in a reply to panel chairman Tun Hanif Omar which was made available to the press, said the panel did not have a legal standing, unlike the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam).

"Suhakam is a statutory body which has a legal framework to investigate any human rights violations, and although the advisory panel was formed by a cabinet decision, it does not have legal powers nor a legal framework necessary to conduct an independent investigation," he said.

Lim added that the bar is nevertheless

willing to meet with Hanif to discuss the reasons for rejecting the invitation.

Ambiga, when contacted via short message system, said she had turned down the invitation but did not elaborate on her reasons.

Hanif, who is former inspector-general of police, had on Aug 6 sent invitations to the Bar and Ambiga to share their findings on the rally with the panel.

He said both the Bar and Bersih are "key participants" in the April 28 rally, without which the panel's report would be incomplete.

The panel was formed on May 2 to investigate the truth behind the rally, which saw 80,000 protesters take to the streets to demand for clean and fair elections.

The rally was initially planned as a peaceful sit-down at Dataran Merdeka, but turned chaotic when a small group of protesters breached a court order barring their entrance into the square.

Public outcry over allegations of police brutality towards protesters and media personnel spurred the government to form the panel, which has been hampered by poor response from the public since it began its hearings on June 18.