

Umno: July 9 rally to be 'kotor', not Bersih
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The rally planned by the Bersih 2.0 coalition for free and fair elections will be anything but clean, said Umno information chief Ahmad Maslan today.

On the contrary, said Ahmad (left) playing on the acronym for the group of political and activist organisations, the Bersih rally will mark a "black spot" on the government's good track record.

"(It) will inconvenience the public, ruin traders, cause losses for business with premises and affect taxi drivers," the deputy minister in the prime minister's department told a press conference at the PWTC building in Kuala Lumpur.

The rally planned by Pakatan Rakyat and several NGOs seeks to submit a memorandum to the Yang DiPertuan Agong containing eight demands for electoral reform.

The demands relate to the call to 'cleanse' the electoral role, reform the postal voting system, introduce the use of indelible ink, ensure free and fair access for the media, guarantee a minimum campaign period of 21 days, stop corruption and 'dirty politics'.

Ahmad's remarks echo those made yesterday by Independent members of parliament Zulkifli Nordin, Zahrain Mohamad Hashim and Ibrahim Ali.

Zulkifli, who is Kulim Bandar Baru MP, said alleged electoral irregularities was merely an excuse to hold a massive demonstration.

"They have numerous options to hold the rally in a closed venue but have chosen instead to create a public spectacle.

"They say the elections were dirty, but they still got five states and they campaign day and night. This is a specific agenda by someone who is stuck and desperate," said the former PKR legislator in reference to Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim.

Zahrain, who is Bayan Baru MP, said the rally would cause "chaos" and lead to the hijacking of democracy by the Opposition.

"Street demonstrations are unhealthy and pose a threat to national security," the former PKR representative was reported as saying.

Those behind the planned rally had cited the demonstrations in Egypt that had led to the collapse of the Hosni Mubarak regime, Zahrain said further.

"What does that mean? They have bad intentions. This is not the democracy we are looking for," he added.

Pasir Mas parliamentarian Ibrahim, meanwhile, warned of a counter-demonstration by his Malay rights group Perkasa in order to stop Bersih from "causing trouble".

'A threat to the country as a whole'

In his press conference today, Ahmad also described the planned rally as a threat to the national economy, especially to the tourism industry and foreign investments.

It (Bersih) is not a threat just to Umno, but to the country (as a whole). Look at the last rally (in Nov 2007).

It took six months for the number of tourists to return to the levels seen before (the rally that year)," said Ahmad.

The deputy minister said there had never been a peaceful demonstration held by the opposition.

"It has never happened. Our experience is that we have never had a peaceful demonstration.

"It just takes one person to be hit with 'hysteria', that's it," he said when asked about PAS Youth's assurance that the gathering would be peaceful if the police gave their cooperation.

Ahmad said further that Bersih did not represent the aspirations of NGOs but merely those of Pakatan leaders, particularly PKR de facto leader Anwar..

"We know the ones behind all of this are the opposition. This is just a tool of the Opposition. This is their dirty agenda," he said while pointing to a picture of PKR, DAP and PAS leaders of Bersih.

The press conference was called after Ahmad attended a meeting with Malay NGO Pertubuhan Kebajikan dan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia (Pekida) which objected to the rally.

Among others, the meeting had urged all quarters including hawkers associations and taxi drivers associations to lodge police reports and sue the rally organisers.

"I call on other NGOs to lodge as many police reports as possible. The taxi drivers can also get lawyers to bring the matter to court," said Ahmad.

Others at the press conference were Federal Territory Pekida advisor Hamzah Daud and president Roslan Dahaman.