

PM gives nod to rally in stadium
Malaysiakini.com
July 5, 2011

The government has declared a truce with the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (Bersih 2.0), agreeing to allow its rally to be held in a stadium.

"I understand Bersih wants to have a meeting with the government on having the rally in a stadium (and we are ready to meet them," Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said today.

However, he said the organisers must agree to several conditions. "(They must) go peacefully, assemble peacefully and leave peacefully," said Najib.

After three members of Bersih 2.0 were granted an audience with Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin at Istana Negara this afternoon, Bersih 2.0 chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan said the NGO coalition agreed to hold the rally in a stadium as a compromise to the original idea of a street rally.

Bersih 2.0's request for the audience came after the Agong issued an unprecedented statement on Sunday night advising against streets rallies.

The Agong had said that, while it is incumbent on the government to fulfill its responsibilities in a "just and wise manner", street demonstrations would bring more harm than good, even if the original intention was good.

No details of the venue and date of the indoor rally were immediately available.

"If any incidents happen, then the organisers will be held responsible. Whatever happens that can cause chaos or damage to public property or harm to any individuals or something or even worse than that," he warned.

"We hope they will keep to their promise so that everything will proceed smoothly without any untoward incidents," said Najib in a brief press conference after chairing the 1st Governance Council Meeting with the Innovation Agency in Putrajaya today.

The prime minister - who first proposed moving the rally indoors - gave thanks to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong for his "timely" intervention to ensure peace and harmony is not threatened.

Najib declined, however, to say if he had met the constitutional monarch this morning, despite mounting speculation after the prime minister's absence at a Performance Management and Delivery Unit (Pemandu) function.

"(Whether) I met the Agong and all that is my right as the prime minister (as) I'm his chief adviser," Najib said.

For police to decide if Bersih is still illegal

Although consenting to holding Bersih's rally indoors, Najib declined to state if the coalition is still illegal.

Last week, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein outlawed Bersih, effective July 1, as the coalition was inciting the people and causing unrest.

Meanwhile the police, in a nationwide crackdown, arrested more than 200 people, including opposition politicians, activists and supporters in connection with the rally.

They were nabbed and questioned mainly for wearing Bersih's yellow T-shirts and other related paraphernalia, which are also deemed illegal.

Currently in custody are six PSM members - including Sungai Siput MP Dr Michael Jeyakumar Devaraj - who were arrested under the Emergency Ordinance in relation to the planned rally and remanded for 60 days.

Asked if Bersih and its yellow T-shirts are still deemed illegal if the rally proceeds in a stadium, Najib said:

"Up to the police to decide. This is a point whereby we consider them illegal they don't consider themselves as illegal but what's important is public interest, I'm concerned with public interest.

"I want to protect the Malaysian public from any untoward incidents and that's why I'm concerned, I do not want this street demonstration to take place because it will be very, very in duress to the public."

The rally would only be allowed to proceed subject to conditions that it is peaceful, he reiterated.

Najib added that Umno Youth's patriot and Malay rights group Perkasa's peace marches will also be called off.

"They are not going to do it because if Umno wants do respond, they will hold a bigger demonstration. I can assure you that the crowd will be very big," he said.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/168987>