

**Gov't briefing on Bersih threat comes unstuck**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**July 6, 2011**

A briefing yesterday by the police and the Election Commission meant to give credence to government claims that the planned Bersih march was fraught with the threat of violence came unstuck when it ran into a thicket of sceptical questions from those being briefed.

Present at the briefing which was held in a leading hotel in Kuala Lumpur even as Bersih's top leaders were being granted an audience by the king at Istana Negara, were some 30 members comprising leaders of the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), Suhakam, and a couple of NGOs.

Arranged by the Prime Minister's Department, the briefing was supposed to have been headed by the inspector-general of police, but he was not able to make it.

In the event, senior officials from the Special Branch deputised for him. But neither they nor the Election Commission chief, who led off the briefing, succeeded in parrying the sceptical thrust of the questions they drew from the briefed.

Sources who attended say by the time the wobbly affair ended four-and-a-half hours after its start at 2.30pm, the government side was left wondering if they had severely overestimated the credulity of the attendees.

The briefing, moderated by Minister in the PM's Department Koh Tsu Koon, was prompted by a statement from the MCCBCHST issued days earlier that affirmed Bersih's right to engage in a peaceful demonstration of their concerns, which were for more integrity and transparency to the electoral process.

In an apparent attempt to dispel doubts about the integrity of the electoral process generated by Bersih's much publicised qualms, Aziz Yusof, the EC chair, began yesterday's briefing by holding forth on the authenticity of measures instituted by the EC.

But when he suddenly and over a lengthy span engaged moderator Koh in a private tete-a-tete, seemingly oblivious of his audience, an irate attendee chided him and said the episode was emblematic of the EC's lack of independence and undue deference to the powers-that-be.

"You are more interested in pleasing the government than in clearing our doubts," the EC chair was chastised.

Stung and chagrined, Aziz's brief careened to a halt.

**Why Jeyakumar, not Ibrahim Ali?**

But top-notch personnel from the Special Branch who followed in Aziz's wake did not fare better.

Senior Assistant Commissioner Soffian Mohd Makinuddin, chief assistant director, Department of Extremist Threats, painted a picture of explosive peril lurking in the Bersih march if it were permitted to be held.

He told the audience investigations and arrests thus far had led police to believe that it was hazardous to national security to allow the Bersih march to take place.

His spiel unravelled the minute he was queried as to why - if all he had depicted of the Bersih threat were true - a rabble-rousing Ibrahim Ali of Perkasa was allowed to be free to vent his inflammatory spleen in a supposedly fraught public arena.

Soffian clamped up at the query and became more taciturn when the same questioner followed up by arguing that the detention of Parti Sosialis Malaysia MP for Sungai Siput, Dr Jeyakumar Deveraj, under the Emergency Ordinance 1969 was an abomination given Ibrahim's freedom to disport in incendiary fashion.

With both the EC chair and the Special Branch luminary down for the count, the leaders from MCCBCHST and the other NGOs stepped up to the plate and drove home the point that the problem with the country was the lack of institutional independence and integrity.

Sans public confidence in institutions like the police force and the EC, they held, questions would always recur about the integrity of an exercise to establish justice and assure the credibility of the elected.

At this point what began as a briefing to bolster the government's credibility turned out to be an affair where the reasons for its lack thereof were aired.

The supposedly transformed, from the famed Government Transformation Programme, ironically became aware of the need for self-transformation.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd  
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/169141>