

PM urges anti-Bersih 'silent majority' to speak up
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today called on the "silent majority" of Malaysians, who he claimed were opposed to yesterday's Bersih 2.0 rally, to make their stand clear in cyberspace.

He said the time has come for them to stop being the silent majority, and take advantage of the many tools available to them online such as social networking sites to air their views.

"I think it's about time for people to stand up and be counted, (and state) how they feel about (the Bersih 2.0 rally)," he said at a press conference after addressing a delegation of 6,000 Umno and NGO members in PWTC this morning.

While implying that his administration prefers that the public state their opinions on the internet, Najib stressed that the government's aversion for street rallies does not mean they shun democracy.

"It does not mean we are not committed to democracy in this country, and the rule of law... there is already democracy in this country," he said.

Najib brushed aside claims of a 50,000-strong turnout by the Bersih 2.0 rally organisers, claiming that it would have been easy for Umno to call out a larger turnout if it was so inclined.

"This (morning's turnout) is but a fraction of our strength. Six thousand people, we managed to call out on such short notice, and they represent hundreds of thousands more.

"Umno alone has three million members, and this is not including other NGOs. If we give the signal to do something, they are willing.

"But we are not parties who do not respect the law," he said, in an apparent reference to the government's ban on Bersih 2.0.

'No physical contact'

Najib also defended the police from claims of abuse, brushing aside allegations of a man dying from tear gas exposure and of police brutality.

"It was not because of the rally. It was a certain health condition as a result... There was no physical abuse at all," he said to claims that protester Burhanudin Ahmad, 59, died after being hit by tear gas and due to rough handling by the police.

He repeated inspector general of police Ismail Omar's insistence that police had used "minimal force" to disperse the demonstrators, claiming that police did not lay a finger on them.

"No, there is no police (brutality), police used minimum force. There was no actual physical contact at all with the demonstrators," he said.

When asked about the timing of his trip to Rome for a meeting with Pope Benedict XVI – which coincided with the Bersih 2.0 rally – Najib implied that there was no pressing matter to keep him homebound.

"In today's globalised world, if there's something that requires me to come back, I'll come back. I make a U-turn, it's only just a few hours away.

"In any case, you are in constant communication, in real time. It doesn't matter whether I am in Turkmenistan, or whether I am in Kota Kinabalu, I'm still in communication all the time and we can always make decisions, issue instructions or whatever it is.

“And if it requires my presence, as I said I can always hop on a plane and be back in a jiffy,” he said.

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