

Bersih rally treated with kid gloves, reiterates Najib
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Unperturbed by local and international pressure over the crackdown against Bersih 2.0 rally last Saturday, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak continued to maintain his stand that the police had used minimum force with no physical contact at all with the demonstrators.

According to the New York Times, Najib told a small group of international correspondents on Wednesday in London, that if the government had allowed street demonstrations like the Bersih 2.0 rally, the country would face protracted instability.

"Public order is very important in Malaysia because if we allow street demonstrations, there'll no end to it, there will be another group that wants to demonstrate," said Najib (left in white), who was in London to meet British Prime Minister David Cameron during his four-day official visit to Britain.

If protests are not controlled, "you will get a situation in which more and more of these street demonstrations will take place," he said.

He again defended the police, saying they had used "minimum force, and there was no physical contact at all with the demonstrators."

However, Najib conceded that "a maximum of 15,000" people had turned up at Saturday's rally, contrary to the earlier statement by police which put the number at 5,000 to 6,000.

Bersih 2.0, however, contended it was 50,000.

Bersih stubbornness gets a whacking

Najib also blamed the electoral reform coalition for insisting on taking to the streets despite the government offering the opportunity to NONEhold the rally in a stadium.

"I was saddened by the fact that they didn't accept the government's offer.

"They still insisted on marching through the streets, because I think they wanted to get maximum publicity and secondly to challenge the authority in the hope of turning this into an issue," he said.

On the eight demands raised by Bersih 2.0, Najib promised to address some of them including "cleaning up the electoral list" to prevent voting fraud by ensuring a biometric record of all voters.

The government would also seek to "clarify" the postal vote system through which the armed forces and police cast ballots, according to him.

Najib said it was "up to the Election Commission to decide" whether to establish rules on extending the period for political campaigning.

He stressed that the government is committed to "clean and fair" elections.

Asked when the next general election will be held, Najib only said: "when the situation is right", refusing to be pinned down on the timing.

"You'll just have to look at the crystal ball."

Foreign Ministry refutes WSJ editorial

Apart from that, the Foreign Ministry had written a letter to refute an editorial published by the Wall Street

Journal on Tuesday which condemned the crackdown.

In the letter published today in the same newspaper, the ministry's undersecretary of information Ahmad Rozian stressed that Malaysia is still a "true democracy" and all allegations of heavy-handed behaviour of the police during the rally will be thoroughly investigated.

"As the strong performance of opposition parties in the last general election demonstrates, the ballot box remains the most powerful force in Malaysian politics."

He argued that Najib had worked to find a solution that would allow Bersih 2.0 to exercise their constitutional right to peaceful assembly.

"This included offering the use of a large-capacity stadium where the event could be held safely and without disrupting the lives and businesses of ordinary Malaysians."

However, he said the protest organisers rejected the offer and insisted to have the rally at a "much smaller stadium" despite the fact that it was unavailable.

Ahmad also claimed that some of the protesters attempted to use violence in the rally.

"Faced with thousands of people attempting to enter an unsuitable venue in a densely populated area, the police were forced to intervene to disperse the crowd, a task that was made more difficult by the presence of a small minority of protesters intent on violence."

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