

Pop-up protests follow Najib around London
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Malaysian campaigners kept up the pressure for electoral reform during Prime Minister Najib Razak's recent official visit to the UK.

Following the Bersih 2.0 solidarity march in London on 9 July which attracted some 500 people, a series of 'pop-up' demonstrations by protestors in yellow, the colour of the campaign for electoral reform in Malaysia, accompanied Najib's London itinerary last week.

The most recent protest took place outside the Intercontinental Hotel in London where the prime minister and his wife hosted a dinner on Friday.

Guests and the prime minister were greeted by the now familiar colour and demands by around 40 noisy protesters, for clean and fair elections, the abolition of the ISA, and release of all those detained without charge.

Onlookers were later entertained by a rendition of the Beatles' Yellow Submarine chosen for the colour and alluding to the government's purchase of a submarine that failed to submerge.

The protest was attended by Bersih 2.0 steering committee member Vincent Khoo who expressed his appreciation for the solidarity actions in London.

He said that Bersih 2.0 was working closely with human rights NGO Suaram to document all acts of police brutality and that the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) has announced that they will be holding a public enquiry.

Friday's protest was the third in the week that has dogged the prime minister. The previous day saw a bigger protest pop up just after lunch to greet Najib for his meeting with the Lord Mayor and London business leaders in central London.

That protest also attracted the interests of passing Malaysians working in the city and more crucially business leaders attending the meeting who indicated that they were aware and concerned about recent developments.

This followed a smaller but no less vocal demonstration on Wednesday outside the British prime minister's official residence at 10 Downing Street where Najib was scheduled to have lunch with David Cameron.

That lunch was cancelled on account of Cameron being held up in Parliament and the meeting was rescheduled to Thursday when Najib and his wife also met the Queen. There was no protest at Buckingham Palace but the Malaysian PM would have noted Her Majesty's choice of dress: yellow.

Group exerts pressure on British MPs

Coincidence or otherwise, Najib may have greater cause for concern with the other aspects of the Bersih 2.0 campaign, in particular the lobbying of British MPs.

According to organisers, the group will continue to exert pressure on the Malaysian government from overseas and has been working with MPs in Westminster, with some results already.

"Our message to the Malaysian government is that we will continue to lobby the UK government to review its dealings with Malaysia until meaningful electoral reforms are made and all detainees are charged or released," said Yolanda Augustin of the London campaign.

"The government must realise that the days of arbitrary arrests and suppression of peaceful protests are the signs of government desperation as the events in the Middle East suggest."

The pop-up protests coincided with growing international concern and some high-profile media coverage.

The UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Amnesty International both expressed concern and dismay at the recent violent clampdown in Malaysia while an article in The Guardian newspaper urged the Malaysian government to abandon the failed 'Mubarak model'.

JEFF TAN is a Malaysian academic based in London.

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