

Activists check out from Dataran - for a few hours

MalaysiaKini.com

April 21, 2012

By Nigel Aw

Activists occupying Dataran Merdeka have agreed to dismantle their tents to make way for the royal concert which will be held tonight.

The accord was struck after negotiations with Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) in which the group's supplies and tents will be temporarily stored in a DBKL truck.

"After the event, you can call me and I will return your things, but I cannot set them up for you," said a DBKL officer in charge, who wished to be known as Fuat.

Following a brief discussion, the activists, numbering at about 20, proceeded to dismantle their tents at 5pm and loaded their items onto a DBKL truck with the assistance of a City Hall officer.

"We stressed that we have a right to occupy Dataran but out of the spirit of cooperation, we will comply with DBKL's instructions (to remove tents). However, we are doing this in protest," said Occupy Dataran activist Fahmi Reza.

He added that while the tents have been dismantled, the group will still remain at Dataran Merdeka.

"There are no camps but we will still physically occupy here," he said.

"We do this with the condition that every item stored on DBKL's truck would be recorded in the inventory and the truck will be parked nearby where we can all watch it," he added.

Fahmi said that he expects to retrieve the tents and all other items by 11.30pm tonight when the royal concert concludes.

"They have promised us on record and in front of the press, and if they don't return our stuff then their action would be in bad faith," he said.

Some 200 police officers and seven Federal Reserve Unit trucks were at Dataran Merdeka, but they were busy preparing for the Agong's arrival and made no attempt intervene in the matter.

At press time, the stage for the concert has been erected as participants rehearsed their performances.

Confusion over DBKL's 'promise'

Earlier, Occupy Dataran insisted that DBKL had allowed the group to maintain three tents at the site tonight during the scheduled royal concert, but DBKL authorities said otherwise.

NONE Occupy Dataran activist Kris Khaira (right in photo) said DBKL had initially asked them to dismantle the three tents holding their supplies to make way for ambulance parking, but had later decided to give in to the occupiers.

"We had promised to keep our place neat. We will not hold any programmes or play any music," he said.

The DBKL officers then were even so friendly as to ask if the ambulances would disrupt them, he added.

However, DBKL's Fuat had said the activists must move their tents to the underground section of Dataran Merdeka to make way for ambulance parking in conjunction with the concert tonight.

They have been given a 5pm deadline, he had said when met at DBKL's mobile office at the iconic city square.

NONE "We have spoken to them nicely and 'given them face' but if they insist on not complying, then we have no other choice but to use the rough way," he said.

Yesterday, the two groups occupying Dataran Merdeka, namely Occupy Dataran and Solidariti Mahasiswa Malaysia (SMM) said that DBKL had given them verbal permission to retain their three tents.

The SMM students had decided to move out until Sunday in respect of the concert.

However, Occupy Dataran activists are staying put, promising not to disrupt the event or set up more tents until it is over.

Students to return tomorrow

NONE Another Occupy Dataran activist Fahmi Reza (right) had argued that the decision to retain only three tents was not intended to disrespect the Agong's concert.

"We can peacefully share this public space without disrupting the concert.

"By now DBKL respects us because for the past eight days we have proven that we can be peaceful," he said.

Occupy Dataran is non-partisan grassroots democracy group which before joining forces with the students for a two-week camp until the Bersih 3.0 rally on April 28, had camped at Dataran Merdeka on a weekly basis.

Meanwhile, when contacted, SMM activists and Bangkit Malaysia chief Mohd Syahid Mohd Zaini said the students will only return to Dataran Merdeka on Sunday after the concert is over.

The royal concert tonight which expects to draw some 15,000 is to celebrate the installation of the country's 14th Agong.

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