

Police get court order, Dataran off-limits for 4 days
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The Magistrate's Court has issued a court order barring Bersih 3.0 from the vicinity of Dataran Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur tomorrow until May 1, said Bersih.

According to the order issued yesterday evening, the ban includes roads leading to the iconic landmark and its surrounding lands.

Issued by the KL Magistrate's Court, magistrate Zaki Asyraf Zubir justified the ban as Bersih had failed to obtain the City Hall's permission to use the premises.

"This court has found that Bersih 3.0 will carry on its rally even without approval from Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) or informing the Dangli Wangi district police chief.

He ruled that "decisive action is required to avoid an act that will threaten public order or endanger public life or safety" should the rally proceed.

Zaki said "a ban order is absolutely necessary" considering the urgency of the request.

"Therefore, any gathering at Dataran Merdeka, that is the land bordering Jalan Sultan Hishamuddin, Jalan Raja and Jalan Kelab except the area occupied by the Selangor Royal Club... is hereby banned, and the public are warned against attending, being present or taking part in any gathering from April 28, 2012 to May 1, 2012," read the order.

The order was served upon Bersih chairperson S Ambiga, "the organisers" and "the public".

Signed 'under protest'

According to the document sighted by Malaysiakini, the coalition for clean and fair elections signed receipt of the document at noon today "under protest".

Meanwhile, early this morning DBKL began a lockdown of Dataran Merdeka where the sit-in protest is to take place.

The developments today contrast with Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein earlier saying twice that the rally was "not a security threat".

Bersih is however adamant on its sit-in tomorrow to call for electoral reform, adding that recent amendments to the Election Offences Act was reason enough to justify the rally.

Organisers are expecting the crowd this year to be more than double last July, when tens of thousands took part.

"We believe the sit-in will be safe because if a lot of people turn up and the numbers are huge enough, the police will be forced to behave themselves," organising committee member Wong Chin Huat (right) told AFP.

"If the authorities come down hard on us with violence, it will go to show the world how this country is run by the Najib administration."

Bersih co-coordinator Ambiga Sreenivasan accused the city's mayor of abusing his power by banning the rally.

The coalition has rejected an offer to hold the protest in alternative venues, including stadiums, saying it is too late to change the location.

"We will march to the barrier. We will not break the barriers or create any situation in the hopes that the government will lift the barrier and allow the sit-in to take place," she told a news conference.

Bersih has emerged as a key pressure group against Najib who took office in 2009 and pledged political and economic reform in a bid to reverse some of the ruling coalition's 2008 election losses.

NONE "A larger turnout for Bersih will see Najib make some modifications in his election strategy," Ibrahim Suffian, a director at research firm Merdeka Center, told Reuters.

Later this afternoon, the City Hall put up a banner at the banned site which reads: "Thank you for respecting the law. No rally in Dataran Merdeka."

Dataran closure an 'insult'

Meanwhile DAP national organising secretary Teresa Kok criticised the home minister's "flip-flop" in considering the rally a security threat, asking, "What has changed?"

"(Hishamuddin's) U-turn decision regarding the peaceful assembly tomorrow is symptomatic of the Malaysian government's lack of respect towards its electorate and its high-handedness in dealing with dissenting views," said the Seputeh MP in a statement today.

She said the police's resolve to take action against rally participants made Malaysia a "police state" controlled "menacingly" by BN.

She added the latest developments showed that Prime Minister Najib Razak is "insincere with his ideologies of transformation" and slammed the KL mayor as a "tool of the BN government".

PAS Youth also slammed the lockdown of the Dataran, calling it an "insult to Malaysians".

NONE "PAS Youth regrets that DBKL and the government do not respect the rakyat of this country," said its information chief Riduan Mohd Nor in a statement.

While tourists were allowed to visit the Dataran at any time, it was ironic that the rakyat were barred from going there, he said.

"The people are saddened because the government treats the people as a security threat that needs to be countered endlessly," said Riduan.

"It seems this is how BN treats the rakyat, just as orphans who can be abandoned," he said, adding sarcastically that DBKL may as well "close Dataran for good".

