

Hisham: Whatever happens tomorrow, my duty's done
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By Nigel Aw

Describing the Bersih 3.0 rally tomorrow as a day the country will be tested, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said the government has done all it can to deal with whatever that is to happen.

NONE "We are going to be tested tomorrow and everybody will need to be responsible. Has Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak not done enough to show he is serious about reforms?"

"Tomorrow is a big day, but my conscience is clear. I have done all I can as home minister and Najib has done all he can for reform," Hishammuddin told a special media briefing at the Bukit Aman police headquarters this afternoon.

Speaking to some 30 top newspaper editors, he said anything could possibly happen tomorrow and genuine NGOs that wanted to benefit from the prime minister's reforms would lose out, especially if politicians were to hijack the Bersih 3.0 rally.

"As we chart further, we will see if we can loosen things up (more reforms), but God forbid, if something unfortunate happens, we may have to take two steps back," he warned.

'We've given Bersih all avenues'

Police action tomorrow, he said, will depend on what Bersih 3.0 organisers decide on protest day and how the situation unfolds.

"I'm quite disappointed, we've bent over backwards to give all the avenues they (Bersih) wanted but it looks as if they have turned down every opportunity we have given them," he said in reference to the alternative venues the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) has offered for the electoral reform group's protest tomorrow.

DBKL has ruled that Dataran Merdeka is off-limits for the protest but rally organisers had insisted on the iconic square for its sit-in demonstration.

However, following a court order obtained by police earlier today barring anyone from gathering at the historic square, Bersih 3.0 organisers have said they will abide by it but will try to get as near as possible to the square.

Hishammuddin added that even though Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan has been hammering about electoral reform, the protest itself is a convergence of various discontent groups for the sake of getting people on the streets.

"I see there is a mixing of issues... They have related this to Lynas, to the free sex movement, to the Rapid project in Pengerang, it doesn't gel, how do you gel free sex with PAS?" he said.

Sexual minority support group Seksualiti Merdeka has earlier today denied that it was holding a pro-lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual rally or participating in the Bersih 3.0 rally, pointing out that any such event was the work of imposters and provocateurs.

He also asked Chinese newspapers to note the mixing of Lynas issues with Bersih 3.0's rally, but did not elaborate.

The Chinese press have given much coverage to the controversies surrounding Lynas' RM700 million

rare earths processing plant in Gebeng, Kuantan.

'Press must be fair to gov't'

Addressing the newspaper editors, Hishammuddin said he is not asking for the press to favour the government during tomorrow's coverage but asked that they be fair to the government.

"We are not asking you to support us, just see us as being fair, unless you are prejudiced against us yourselves," he said.

Addressing concerns that the foreign media may not represent an accurate picture of tomorrow's events, Hishammuddin urged the editors to do their part in responding to their reports.

Meanwhile, he added that the government is "getting its act together" with a briefing of its own with foreign diplomats later today on the Bersih 3.0 rally tomorrow.

When it was pointed out that the police may be painted as the "bad guys" should the police decide to fire even a single tear gas canister at protesters tomorrow, Hishammuddin explained that the police would ultimately be responsible for the country's security.

"If Kuala Lumpur burns like London they (public) will also blame the police," he said in reference to last year's London riots.

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