

Bersih: Some protesters' behaviour 'unusual'
MalaysiaKini.com
April 28, 2012
By S Pathmawathy

Electoral reforms pressure group Bersih says it is shocked by allegations that some of its supporters had acted violently during the Bersih 3.0 rally today.

Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan described allegations of violence committed by the movement's supporters as "highly unusual".

NONE Among the acts of violence witnessed included the overturning of a police vehicle, which she suspects could have been instigated by agent provocateurs.

"We have this suspicion (because) this is a highly unusual behaviour on the part of our supporters," she told reporters at a brief press conference in KL Sentral, after the end of the sit-in today.

From the past two rallies organised by the coalition on Nov 10, 2007 and July 9, 2011, Ambiga said, it was evident that such "elements" are not recognised.

"But I will not say more until we have the facts," she said, adding that the perpetrators must face legal action.

About 4.30pm, a police vehicle on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman had allegedly hit two rally participants in front of the Sogo shopping mall.

Following the incident, an angry mob surrounded the police vehicle, which was quickly abandoned by its occupants, and overturned it.

'Not something Bersih encouraged'

Recounting her own experience, Ambiga said the size of crowd was "tremendous" and estimated that up to 300,000 people showed up at the city centre to get to Dataran Merdeka.

NONE Ambiga had made her way from Pasar Seni to Masjid Jamek and stopped right in front of the barbed wire barricades surrounding Dataran Merdeka, together with other members of the Bersih steering committee.

"We gave the order to disperse very quickly, by 2.30pm, because as we got to Dataran Merdeka, it was very difficult for people to sit down.

"Within 30 minutes of us giving the order to disperse, a truck came, moving in front... the people just wanted to see those in the truck. I think there were some who moved forward and broke the barrier, which was not something we anticipated or supported," she said.

The coalition had said yesterday that it would abide by the court order and prevent supporters from trespassing into Dataran Merdeka. Bersih protesters, it announced, would gather along the streets bordering the historical square.

Bersih will cooperate fully with police

"We have been saying right from the start that we will not break the barrier and I think that caused the tear gas to be fired. But we have to gather the facts, because we think there was excessive use of tear gas," she said.

However, nothing could be certain, Ambiga said, until all relevant facts were compiled and that the coalition would cooperate fully with the police in this.

NONE“As far as we are concerned all those who engaged in acts of violence, who went to break down the barrier and everything else... should face the full brunt of the law.

“It is not something we encouraged and it is certainly not something we want to do,” she added.

Malaysiakini journalists at various points in the city centre from early morning to late this evening have together estimated that 100,000 people took part in the Bersih 3.0 sit-in.

However, what started as peaceful march turned chaotic when the riot police launched tear gas canisters and chemical-laced water at the protesters after a number of them were said to have broken through the barbed wire fencing surrounding Dataran Merdeka.

According to the latest official information, 388 people have been arrested and detained at several police detention centres in the city.

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