

How the Dataran cordon was breached
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Before 3pm yesterday, Bersih 3.0 was a triumph. After 3pm, it was a tragedy. By many accounts, the turning point was when the northern Dataran Merdeka barricade was breached.

dataran breach barricade cordon 290412Minutes before, a truck ferrying Bersih 2.0 co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan and several Pakatan Rakyat leaders had parked at the northernmost point of the Sultan Abdul Samad building less than 10 metres away from the barricade.

In her speech Ambiga had urged the crowd to disperse since the objective of the rally had been achieved, as Bersih supporters had gathered as close as they could to the historic square.

After her speech, PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim took over and reiterated calls for a dispersal.

“We go to the right (into Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman). Do not go left (into Dataran Merdeka). Can you do that?” cried Anwar, which was met with a resounding “Yes”.

But this affirmation was quickly forgotten by the crowd, according to eyewitnesses. Some among the crowd began chanting “masuk (enter)” and momentum began to build.

The first breach

In a video published by Free Malaysia Today, PKR deputy president Azmin Ali was clearly seen motioning to NGO and Pakatan leaders on top of the truck in a “come over” gesture while standing right next to the barricade.

Some of people on top of the truck appeared to disagree and an unidentified person on top of the truck waved his hand in a “no” motion.

dataran breach barricade cordon 290412 azmin aliAfter this exchange, Azmin was seen trying to step down from an elevated platform and people surrounding him conducted the first breach.

A wall of newsmen behind the cordon took several steps back as a few people broke through the barricade and euphoria took over as more charged in.

Some of PAS’ maroon-uniformed Unit Amal personnel were helpless in their attempts to stop the advancing crowd.

Following this, two water cannons were deployed, firing chemical-laced water, but this appeared ineffective, prompting the police to fire numerous rounds of teargas to finish the job.

According to some eyewitnesses, prior to Ambiga’s and Anwar’s arrival next to the barricade, several Pakatan leaders had tried to infer to the crowd that the ultimate objective was to “masuk (enter)” and that the police should “buka (open)” a path.

Why did cops retreat?

This was met with chants of “Buka! Buka! Buka! (Open! Open! Open!)” along the entire stretch of the barricade.

One thing that remains a mystery was how there appeared to be no barbed wire at this portion of the

barricade.

dataran breach barricade cordon 290412 police pixPolice photographs posted on their Facebook page clearly show that breaches further up north along the edge of Dataran Merdeka involved protesters placing the water-filled plastic barricades on top of the barbed wire in order to gain entry.

This was not the case at the segment nearest to the Sultan Abdul Samad building.

Another mystery was how the police allowed the first breach to happen, since they had formed a human wall behind the cordon since the night before.

According to eyewitnesses, the police had suddenly ran away from their positions just before the water cannons were deployed.

A series of photographs from one Malaysiakini reader depicted how there was no breach at the middle of the cordon until the police ran and abandoned the line.

“It was strange. They were literally running from the line. This emboldened the protesters to make a break for Dataran Merdeka,” said one protester, 31, from Taiping.

Another protester said that he had learned from the newspapers that the agreement was not to breach the cordon and he did not do so.

“But those who did were really emotional after the speeches. Even I almost decided to climb over the barbed wire, but was held back by my partner,” he said.

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