

Bersih denies losing control
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By Nigel Aw

Organisers did not lose control on protesters during the Bersih 3.0 demonstration yesterday, insisted Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan.

NONEThe violence that ensued, said Ambiga, only happened after police decided to fire teargas on protesters.

"Bersih condemns any act of violence by any quarters. I would say the 250,000 people yesterday came in peace and did not come for violence.

"All purported acts of violence only took place after teargas was fired. Until then, we had full control of the situation before it all went awry," she said.

She added that Bersih had deployed 6,000 personnel including Unit Amal, who were in charge of security during the rally.

Call for inquiry

In light of this, Ambiga called on the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) to initiate an inquiry into the events of yesterday's protest, which was the biggest since the Reformasi movement in 1999.

"As days go by, you will all know the truth, who were responsible for the act of violence. We think a full inquiry should be held, nothing less," she said.

However, Ambiga admitted that the volleys of tear gas fired by police were in reaction to some protesters attempting to breach the barricade at Dataran Merdeka and Suhakam should similarly investigate this.

"But was it even necessary? Were so many (tear gas canisters) needed? There were so many people there, if you fire into a crowd like that people are bound to get crushed, there is bound to be trouble," she said.

NONEPointing to newspaper reports today alleging violence by protesters at the rally with the image of an overturned police vehicle, Ambiga said videos on YouTube had given a more complete picture.

"YouTube accounts showed the car was overturned because protesters believed someone was under the car and it also showed protesters protecting the police officer," she said.

The inquiry, like the videos, Ambiga said, would be essential to shed light on the exact circumstances of yesterday's event.

'Agents provocateurs may have been present'

She added that the electoral reform movement had received reports that there were possible agents provocateurs who were present during the protest, but added that they are awaiting for more information.

When queried about opposition leaders giving political speeches during the rally, Ambiga said this had not been part of the plan but that she could not control what they wanted to say.

"They are also MPs, and supporters wanted to listen to what they want to say," she said.

NONEMeanwhile, Bersih steering committee Dr Ahmad Farouk Musa (right) said according to Hospital Kuala Lumpur, 117 demonstrators were hospitalised throughout the protest.

“This does not include the people that were treated by the seven medical teams which were on stand-by around Kuala Lumpur,” he said.

There was only one death which was not directly linked to the protest, where a man had died of a heart attack at Jalan Petaling before the demonstration began, he said.

“However, a doctor’s friend had been hit by tear gas canisters in his face and suffered hematoma. We have raised the issue of firing directly on protesters in Bersih 2.0 but it is still happening again this time,” he said.

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