

Azmin: Gesture merely meant negotiation was done
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By S Pathmawathy

PKR deputy president Azmin Ali has denied communicating with party de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim to order the breach of the barricade at Dataran Merdeka during the Bersih 3,0 rally on Saturday.

He said the signals exchanged were to indicate that he had tried to negotiate with the police on the scene, to allow protestors more time to disperse.

NONE "I could see (Anwar) gesturing to me from where he was, to negotiate with the police and I signalled back to him that I had (done so)," Azmin (left in photo) told a press conference at the party headquarters today.

"But the senior police officer said 'I have not received any instructions' and told me to help calm my supporters down. So I told them to sit and calm down."

He said he had pointed his thumb over his shoulder and indicated to Anwar that he had already negotiated with the police.

Anwar, he said, had signalled earlier by rolling his hands and saying "Nego, nego. Make sure you talk to the police officer behind you."

Thousands of protestors had surged forward about 2.30pm when part of the barricade was pushed open, minutes after Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan and Anwar had told the crowd to disperse.

At the same press conference, Anwar had earlier told reporters that if he had wanted the barricade breached, he would have opened his palms and thrust his hands forward.

"I said 'turn to the right', indicating to the supporters to move to Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman," said Anwar.

When the crowd refused to move, he then rolled his hands miming to Azmin to negotiate with the police.

Reporters then pressed Azmin on a video released yesterday, in which Anwar is seen indicating the former to negotiate. Azmin then points his thumb over his shoulder, while an Indian man sporting a yellow t-shirt makes the same gesture.

dataran breach barricade cordon 290412 azmin aliAzmin, who is standing on a platform, nods at Anwar and turns to his right where the man is seen standing on the ground and speaking to Azmin.

When Azmin nods at him, the man pushes open the barrier, letting the crowd flow through.

However, Azmin said today that he cannot remember making any such gesture to the man.

"I cannot remember speaking to anyone. But if anything, it was to indicate that I had negotiated with police," he reiterated.

Several reporters identified the man as a PKR member from Negri Sembilan, but Anwar said he would have to study the footage in order not to jump to conclusions.

'Barrier already breached by then'

PKR vice-president Tian Chua then rose to Azmin's defence, explaining that the first breach of the barricade was not at Dataran Merdeka but closer to the Royal Selangor Club where he had been caught with thousands of supporters.

NONE "The people had already reached the fountain in Dataran before Azmin's side broke through. Police were already getting ready to load tear gas canisters," said Chua.

"This has nothing to do with the barricade. We are talking about the police losing control. If the barrier was not broken, do you think police would not have gone three blocks down chasing demonstrators?"

Asked if the violence had erupted because rally leaders were not able to control the crowd, he said: "We did not lose control. The police lost control."

A blogger identified as Benji Lim interrupted the press conference and related that a stampede ensued after the riot squad had fired tear gas at the crowd.

Lim said he was near the Sogo shopping mall where a police car had crashed after the driver lost control, and angrily told Anwar that "we could have been killed".

The blogger said that, if Azmin had indeed instructed the crowd to push past the barrier, "we have lost the cause for Bersih 3.0".

Lim: There should have been leadership because, where I was, people could have been killed.

Anwar: You don't blame the police for shooting the tear gas?

Lim: Show some leadership ... the cause could have been completely hijacked.

He only stopped talking when Anwar told him that the press conference was to respond to media queries, and that another session would be organised later for those who participated in the rally.

