

Penang assembly opens with rows over Lynas, Bersih
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By Susan Loone

The Penang state legislative assembly opened today with arguments over the scuffle that broke out between anti-Lynas supporters and a hostile group at the Esplanade on Feb 26.

NONESate executive councillor Abdul Malik Abul Kassim (right) took the floor to castigate Umno for allegedly being behind the hostile group, who tried to disrupt the gathering attended by more than 500 people.

He was responding to a written question by RSN Rayer (DAP-Seri Delima) on what was the police action on those who tried to stop the rally, which left two journalists hurt.

Abdul Malik said that since Pakatan Rakyat took office in 2008, there had been various protests by NGOs, as well as members of Umno and MCA.

However, there had been no trouble as the Penang government "is open and allows the rakyat to express themselves".

"There are no disturbances and no provocation like those from Umno," he said, adding that troublemakers were also present during the massive Bersih 3.0 rally to demand clean and fair elections in Kuala Lumpur last Saturday.

'Don't waste Dewan's time'

At this point, Abdul Malik was interrupted by several Umno assemblypersons, who wanted clarification on his reply to the question.

NONEMuhammad Farid Saad (BN-Pulau Betong) (left) said all he wanted to know was what action has the police taken on those alleged to have created trouble that day, and requested Abdul Malik not to waste the Dewan's time.

"If you do not want to listen, don't listen lah," shot back the PKR Batu Maung assemblyperson.

Mohd Arif intervened to tell Abdul Malik to "use the floor to just answer the question", but the latter insisted on explaining the background of what had happened on that Sunday.

Other Umno reps also criticised Abdul Malik, urging him no to waste the Dewan's time as "at the rate we're going, we would have no time to answer other questions", said Jasmin Mohammed (BN-Sungai Dua).

To which Abdul Malik said bluntly, "This is my floor" and went on with his tirade against the hostile group - some of whom were allegedly wearing Umno and Perkasa T-shirts - during the chaotic moments at the Speakers Square.

NONEMeanwhile, RSN Rayer (DAP-Seri Delima) (right), interjected to say that Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng was in danger during the fracas which broke out after his speech rejecting the Australian-based plant in Kuantan and its potential radioactive hazards.

"I understand the police knew about the rally but they were not around - whether in uniform or plainclothes - to control the situation," he alleged.

“Is this the SOP (standard operating procedure) for the police (not to act) when they know those who disturbed the event come from Perkasa or Umno, and that there is no need to control the situation?” he asked.

Photo of Hilmi with Umno Youth members

He then accused Hilmi Yahya (BN-Teluk Bahang) of knowing the “gangsters” because he was seen in a photo published on the Internet with a group of Umno Youth members before the event took place.

“I have proof of this, will the police investigate?” he queried, waving his iPad in the Dewan.

This elicited a response from Shabudin Yahya (BN-Permatang Berangan) who shot back, “Pakatan leaders took photos with Bersih gangsters.”

Abdul Malik cut in to respond to Rayer’s query on SOP, saying it has become a “laughing stock”.

He was referring to Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein who had said, when commenting after several journalists were allegedly harassed and hurt during the rally, that the police can seize the cameras of journalists.

Press personnel from various newspapers were prevented from taking photos of alleged brutality on civilians by the police, who fired tear gas on protesters after some broke through the barricades to enter Dataran Merdeka.

Dataran was the chosen venue of the rally but police managed to obtain a court order to prevent Bersih from using the place.

Inconsistency of response

Later, inspector-general of police Ismail Omar said it was not the police’s SOP to seize press cameras, sparking criticisms from the public over the inconsistency of the response from the two government officials.

On the trouble-makers, Abdul Malik said the situation on Feb 26 only showed that Umno knew the group, and that the police escorted the convoy around the Esplanade.

But Hilmi got up to explain that he hosted a group of Umno Youth members from Seremban who came to network with the party’s members in Balik Pulau the night before the incident.

“What happened after that I do not know. I understand they visited the Speakers Square. I also understand that during the incident, this group (I hosted) was no longer there,” he clarified.

He urged Pakatan to be factual in their claims and not to make unnecessary allegations, saying they had misunderstood him.

