

'Delighted' to hear journalists were assaulted
MalaysiaKini.com
May 04, 2012
By Koh Jun Lin

"I was delighted to hear about journalists being beaten during the Bersih 3.0 rally... because they have for long ignored cases where demonstrators were assaulted."

This was no serious statement. It was a joke made by Bersih steering committee member Hishamuddin Rais at a forum in Kuala Lumpur last night.

NONE"I'm so happy! I cannot hide my smiles. For so long that demonstrators have been beaten, they pretended not to see it. Now, it serves you right!" Hishamuddin (left) said at a forum last night, prompting laughter from the audience.

He said this was a good development because it meant that the 'practical politics class' of Bersih 3.0 had been expanded to include the reporters.

"Their political education has moved forward. They are now doing their second degree. They will go for a PhD soon!" he said of the reporters, causing the 100-odd audience to cheer and laugh.

Hishamuddin was speaking as a panellist at the forum themed 'Police brutality and media blackout'.

The forum was organised by youth group Akademi Pak Sako in the wake of at least 10 reporters and photographers claiming assault during the rally last Saturday and was broadcast live through the online radio channel Radio Bangsar Utama.

NONEAnother panellist, Malaysiakini chief editor Fathi Aris Omar (right), said that the attacks on journalists on April 28 were the most severe and systematic since the Reformasi movement in 1998, because it involved many media personnel from a variety of organisations.

He said he believes that even more media practitioners had been verbally abused that day, although it has yet to be documented.

Fathi also lauded the move by those in the Chinese language press to wear black and print their front pages in black-and-white with yellow ribbons on World Press Freedom Day yesterday to protest against the police violence against journalists.

"Imagine if Utusan Malaysia or Berita Harian did the same," he quipped.

NONE"We have yet to see Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian, The Star doing this... I want to say, before the revolutions and regime changes of the world, there would be a turning point like the changes in Sin Chew Jit Poh," Fathi said, pointing out that the daily had openly demanded that the inspector-general of police apologise.

He said that this is similar to the "elite mobilisation" in Indonesia prior to president Suharto's downfall, where major business and political elites withdrew support for him.

'It may be because of sacking threat'

Responding to questions on why the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) did not seem to be doing anything about the assault on the reporters, Fathi said it may be because of the threat of their leaders being sacked by their employers.

One NUJ president who has been sacked, he said, is Hata Wahari, a former senior journalist with Utusan

Malaysia. "That is the risk that NUJ faces today."

However, Fathi said, this did not mean that NUJ had been cowed into silence. In fact, the union had issued a statement a day after the rally asking whether the police action against the media was meant to cover up the wrongdoings of their men on duty.

"I think this is excellent, coming from NUJ," he said, adding that the union had made progress, although it was still in a political quandary.

NONEHe also said that if NUJ could not fight for press freedom, another organisation would be needed to take up the task.

Other panellists at the forum last night were constitutional law expert Abdul Aziz Bari (left), Latheefa Koya from Lawyers for Liberty, Kumpulan Aktivis Mahasiswa Independen (Kami) president Haziq Abdul Aziz and lawyer Haijan Omar, who had also been a victim of police brutality at the rally.

Also making an appearance and speaking at the forum was former Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections (Mafrel) chief Abd Malek Husin, who brought along a seven-member team of international observers on a fact-finding mission on Malaysia's electoral system and who also observed the Bersih 3.0 rally.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd
Source: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/196937>