

Najib: Bersih 3.0 cost traders 'millions' in losses

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By Nigel Aw

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak tonight blasted the Bersih 3.0 rally for allegedly costing petty traders "millions" in losses during the mammoth rally for electoral reform on April 28.

Standing at the very same site that the Bersih 3.0 rally had been banned from holding their rally, Najib told close to 10,000 petty traders and small business owners, without directly naming Bersih, that this could have been avoided if it had accepted the offer to use the Merdeka Stadium or Bukit Jalil Stadium.

"Who threw sand into the rice bowl of traders? They did not care that traders would suffer.

"Already when there is rain, traders cannot do their business, the noodles, vegetables and hundreds of eggs all would have been a waste.

"But now this done by people, millions of ringgit have been lost by the traders," he said to the crowd gathered at Dataran Merdeka this evening.

This group must be protected and the BN government will continue to defend them, he said to cheers from the ground.

Najib added that the rally tonight was an exemplary example and proved that traders could rally peacefully and in a cultured manner.

"If we want to ask traders to go to the streets, to create chaos, can we?" he asked, as the crowd shouted in reply, "Yes!"

"But traders respect the law and show a good image, they want peace and harmony and today we gather peacefully not only to make a statement but to show the traders' strength," he added.

Traders plied with goodies

Capitalising on the unhappiness of some petty traders who had protested at Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan's house, the premier announced a string of goodies.

Among them is a slash in the licence registration and renewal fee for individual and group traders to a one off RM50 payment for a five-year period, from the usual RM150 to RM300 per annum.

Also included is a 50 percent 'discount' for compounds relating to offences such as late renewal of licences, to take effect from June 1 to Dec 31 this year.

"The government is also looking to update the database of traders to introduce a group insurance.

"If traders fall sick, they do not have social security; therefore the burden for treatment is costly. Therefore we are thinking to protect traders not only during good times and bad times," he said.

He added that if petty traders and small businesses have any grouses, they can now direct it to the Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism Ministry.

The slew of announcements was welcomed with chants of "Hidup BN" from the floor.

"You have the power to decide the future of our country. Use that right and power. Ask yourselves, who has defended you all this while?

"Who has prepared microcredit loans and infrastructure for petty traders? Who has provided the facilities if not BN?" he said.

The rally tonight was one day shy of the Bersih 3.0 protest anniversary, which organisers claimed drew some 250,000 participants to the streets of KL to demand clean and fair elections.

Simultaneous rallies nationwide and globally also drew thousands.

Aside from supporting some petty traders' claims that they have allegedly suffered losses as a result of the protest, the government has also filed a civil suit against the Bersih 3.0 organisers for RM122,000 in damages it has allegedly suffered.