

Saifuddin: No communists or coup bid in Bersih 3.0

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An Umno deputy minister has broken ranks with party president and premier Najib Abdul Razak in arguing that the Bersih 3.0 rally did not involve communist elements or attempt to topple the government.

“I don't agree that Bersih 3.0 was influenced by communists or that it was an attempt to topple the government through street demonstrations,” said Deputy Higher Education Minister Saifuddin Abdullah in his column in Malay daily Sinar Harian today

“It is far from the Arab Spring. This is because the factors that caused the Arab Spring do not exist here.”

Saifuddin's view cannot be more different from Najib's statement on May 4 that the Bersih 3.0 rally was an attempt to topple a democratically-elected government.

“They had the intention to take over Dataran Merdeka, not to gather for two or three hours but for two or three days or even longer, to show that the government cannot control the situation. They wanted to make Dataran Merdeka like the Tahrir Square in Egypt,” Njaib had said.

The statement was echoed by three former police chiefs - Abdul Rahim Mohd Noor, Musa Hassan and Hanif Omar (left) – who called on the police to act against the alleged coup attempt.

Hanif also claimed that pro-communist individuals who were involved in the 1970s demonstrations has been seen at the rally. He was later appointed to lead an independent panel to investigate alleged violence during the rally.

Saifuddin also welcomed the resolutions passed at the extraordinary general meeting of the Malaysian Bar, as well as the Human Rights Commission's decision to hold a public hearing on alleged police brutality during the rally.

‘Wider view required’

Saifuddin, who is often seen as a reformist in Umno, stressed that he does not support Bersih 3.0 but that he will not see the rally with “only one eye”.

“I also didn't support Bersih 2.0 but I agreed with many of its demands. Hence I was quite elated when the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform was established.”

Although Saifuddin was surprised that the final PSC report did not have a clear roadmap for short, middle and long term plans, he said the document should be accepted.

When Bersih announced its plan to hold the rally immediately after the report was passed by

Parliament, Saifuddin opined that it was a hasty decision because Bersih should have allowed the recommendations to be implemented.

“The attendance at Bersih 3.0 was bigger than Bersih 2.0. It was more multiracial. Youths, including university students, are many. More interesting was the participation of the middle class,” he commented.

Saifuddin claimed that many participants were fence-sitters who have not made up their decision as to which party to vote for.

He also noticed that many protesters had different objectives such as the National Higher Education Fund and the Lynas rare earth refinery.

Hence the rally should be fairly and truly evaluated from various sources “including those who are not in line with us”, he added.

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