

'Maximum restraint' order for cops at Bersih 3.0 rally

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By Koh Jun Lin

Kuala Lumpur police chief Mohmad Salleh has testified before a government-initiated independent panel on police procedures in handling the Bersih 3.0 rally on April 28.

He told the panel, headed by former police chief Hanif Omar, that the police had been ordered to maintain “maximum restraint”.

Protesters were not stopped from marching on the streets of the city, as the police were only to act to uphold a court order declaring Dataran Merdeka and roads around it a restricted area.

“And they (had) made certain that you know that is the limit, and they put (up) barricades. Three lines of barricades. So if you break through, it means you absolutely want to break through,” Hanif told reporters after the first day of the hearing in Putrajaya today.

Hanif also explained when asked that the barricades were placed 50 metres away from the court-ordered restricted area because of the Peaceful Assembly Act requires it.

He said the riot police’s standing orders if it were dispersing a sit-in protest were to first issue three warnings, each ten minutes apart.

“But it does say that if the situation changes, then you do what needs to be done,” he said without elaborating further.

When asked whether there was an order to chase protesters to areas far from the Dataran Merdeka, he said, it is not in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), but the question would be referred to police officers on the ground on future hearings.

Hanif also quoted Mohmad saying that some 8,000 police officers from across the peninsula were involved in policing the pro-electoral reform rally, and he had personally briefed them on the SOPs at the Police Training Centre (Pulapol) in Kuala Lumpur prior to the rally.

What we are interested to see is that the SOPs conform with the law and UN standards,” he said, adding that Mohmad (left) had been told to check whether it incorporates the Medellin Declaration on the protection of media.

Also scheduled to testify today were theSun editor R Nadeswaran and former Kuala Lumpur CID chief Mat Zain Ibrahim, but the latter was abroad and did not show up.

Reporters invited to testify

Instead, two reporters assigned to cover the panel sitting were invited to testify.

“I was supposed to cover Nadeswaran, but then I found out it was a closed-door session. Suddenly the secretariat asked me if I wanted to testify, so I thought ‘why not’ and contacted my boss,” said theSun reporter Pauline Wong.

The other reporter was The Malaysian Insider assistant editor Clara Chooi.

Hanif also said as an “administrative panel” formed by the Home Ministry, it does not have the power to compel witnesses to testify, nor could it offer legal immunity to witnesses.

Therefore, he said the panel is dependent on people’s willingness to come forth, and has legal advisers to ensure that witnesses don’t put themselves at risk.

“We will call for the charge sheets of those who have been charged so we can know how close we can move,” he said of the panel’s concerns of sub judice.

On the vacancies in the panel after two members had dropped out, Hanif said one had been taken up by former Federal Court Judge Nik Hashim Nik Abdul Rahman, while the Home Ministry is still trying to fill the other vacancy.

The panel would reconvene on Wednesday next week, but neither Hanif nor the panel’s secretariat member Wan Muhammad Ruhaizi Wan Hussin could confirm who is next to testify.

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