

Bersih 3.0 inquiry panel visits Dataran Merdeka
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Former inspector-general of police Hanif Omar and his four Bersih inquiry panel members visited the iconic Dataran Merdeka today for a first-hand look at what the police and the crowd would have faced during the April 28, Bersih 3.0 rally.

Hanif and the panel members spent about 55 minutes to try to understand how the massive crowd allegedly disobeyed the magistrate's order banning their presence at Dataran Merdeka, how they breached the barricades and went 100 metres into Jalan Raja, near the exclusion zone.

Hanif and the panel members were briefed on the police formations and positions at the time of the incident.

So far police personnel and four members of the public have testified before the panel.

This included a reporter from theSun, Pauline Wong, who testified today. All proceedings before the panel are held behind closed doors.

This is the first time the panel has come to the field to get a clearer picture of what transpired on April 28.

Earlier, the panel visited the police training centre (Pulapol) on Jalan Semarak to witness the Federal Reserve Unit and the police anti-riot squad formations and the equipment they use.

Accompanying them during the visit were Kuala Lumpur police chief Mohmad Salleh and Dang Wangi OCPD Dzulkarnain Abdul Rahman.

Hanif told reporters that the door was still open for the Bar Council and members of the Bersih steering committee to testify before the panel.

"Our secretariat is keeping in touch with them to check whether they are prepared to meet with the panel," he said.

'There is no quarrel about it'

"We are still prepared to hear from them and it can be done at our place or their place. There is no quarrel about it. I want to know what actually happened, as the directive given by the government to the panel is to understand what happened on that day."

The panel has come here, Hanif said, to understand what happen on site and to get to know why the police could not hear or see certain things, why they saw certain things and others did not, and that all these had to be done on site for the panel members to get a clearer view.

"There were three layers of the barricades, the barbed wire, then the steel barricade proper. And then the Kuala Lumpur City Hall panels. We got to know there was a sea of people along Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, and Jalan Tun Perak," he said.

Hanif said the police ground commander could not give orders himself on all occasions as he was on the ground but not everybody could see him.

He said many at that time were using their handphones and walkie-talkies and this resulted in congestion of the communication lines.

Breaching barricades violation of court order

"Bukit Aman was also monitoring. There are orders that they cannot breach this (barricades). They had already broken the law by marching down on the streets... it is okay, but you cannot breach the barricades as it violates the court order."

The police had obtained a court order a day before the rally, barring protesters from the vicinity of Dataran Merdeka for four days.

"Once the breach began, then they asked for permission to take action. Permission was given, by which time the protesters had already passed the big tree near Jalan Raja.

"Why action took so long? One troop had pushed the crowd from Dataran Merdeka to the Sime Darby building on Jalan Raja Laut and it took two hours to move them," Hanif said.

The former IGP said the panel had to understand all that and unless they were on the ground, it would be difficult for them to understand.

Hanif said the panel has also viewed 78 hours of video recordings provided to it and other videos taken from YouTube, and will also view personal videos submitted to the panel.

"The panel has agreed to view all the videos to get a clear picture, and there is no allegation that we are selective," he said.

Hanif said the government-appointed panel would also take into account the Human Rights Council's (Suhakam) findings before making its own findings.

He said there was no set time-frame for the panel has to complete its findings.

"We will get all the data that we can get and that includes the Suhakam report, because they have the power to call the people.

"We (the panel) have no such power. I am just an administrative alternative option to the inquiry," he said in ending the press conference.

The panel members also visited the Sogo shopping mall on Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, which was another gathering point for the electoral reform rally protesters.