

'Police made Bersih 3.0 protesters angry'

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Protesters only reacted by throwing discarded water bottles and abandoned slippers after the police fired tear gas and launched a water cannon during the Bersih 3.0 rally, a public inquiry was told today.

Brothers Hanif and Hanafi Ahmad Zainuddin of Seremban told the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) that a crowd had gathered at the junction of Jalan Tun Perak with Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman, near Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur at about 2pm on April 28.

"I think the demonstrators only attacked because the anti-riot squad fired tear gas and the water cannon. The police were trying to rile them up. They were angry," said Hanif, 36, who works as a contractor.

Hanif, who was the ninth witness today, said that a ruckus followed as the thousands cramped on the street behind the barricades cordoning off Dataran Merdeka were attempting flee.

The duo were near Masjid Jamek LRT transit station, on Jalan Tun Perak when they heard alarm bells from the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) ringing.

At this juncture, while escaping the plumes of tear gas fumes, he said he saw participants of the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih 3.0) rally throw stones, apart from the water bottles and footwear.

After managing to retreat to the HSBC Bank building behind Masjid Jamek, he found his brother Hanafi and regrouped with friends who had travelled with them from Seremban.

"About 10 to 15 of us were sitting on the pavement at the side of the building.

"It was about 4pm and I thought the sit-in rally was over. We were just relaxing and ready to leave the spot but the LRT station was closed, we had to take the train back to Pandan Indah.

"Suddenly we saw about three to four police officers running after a person with a camera. They caught him, confiscated the camera, removed the memory card and started beating him up," said Hanif.

He related that the police shifted their focus to his group and came after them.

"But we did not attempt to run because we were just sitting there and the protest was over, what was the crime?" said Hanif.

'Surrounded by at least 10 cops'

He said that he was surrounded by at least 10 cops while another group surrounded his friends.

He was assaulted, arrested and brought to the Police Training Centre (Pulapol) where he was kept until 3am before being released.

Hanafi, 34, on the other hand managed to evade arrest but sustained a few blows from trying to stop the cops from assaulting his nephew and elder brother.

"First, they caught my nephew, dragged him by the shoulder. I told him not to fight because it might get worse.

"But then they brought him a little further and started bashing him up. He was curled on the floor and they were kicking him.

"I ran towards him to stop them from beating him up. I turned to call my brother when I saw him surrounded by cops.

"There were about 10 to 15 personnel so I ran back to my brother, he was on the ground, half-conscious and bleeding from the nose. I shouted at them to stop," he said.

Hanifi, who is a farmer at a Federal Land Development Authority (Felda) scheme, said that he was nabbed by the cops at that moment and they had punched and kicked him.

However, he wriggled his way out and frantically ran away from the police.

Along the way he had found his nephew, who had also escaped from being arrested, and left the scene.

The Suhakam panel which conducted the questioning is headed by its vice-chairperson Khaw Lake Tee and assisted by commissioners Detta Samen and Mahmood Zuhdi A Majid.

Khaw, at a brief press conference after the inquiry, said that members of the media who were allegedly assaulted during the Bersih 3.0 rally have been slotted to testify on Wednesday.

She added that the Suhakam secretariat is also taking statements from police personnel to ensure that they cover their grounds.

"We are trying to see if they rebut the testimonies given thus far. We have to get the other side so that no one says we are being biased," said Khaw.

The inquiry resumes tomorrow.