

## **FRU blames Azmin, Anwar for Bersih 3.0 chaos**

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**By Koh Jun Lin**

The Bersih 3.0 rally was calm until opposition leaders such as Azmin Ali and Anwar Ibrahim riled up the crowd, a Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) officer told the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) public inquiry today.

Superintendent Zahari Mohd Yusoff, who was in charge of all four FRU units on duty at the event, testified that the duo showed up near Dataran Merdeka at about noon and started making inflammatory speeches.

"Then, the crowd's spirit was roused," he said.

He said that although he could not hear the speeches clearly, he could see the crowd cheering and chanting "reformasi", "charge (to Dataran Merdeka)" and hurling verbal abuses at the police. To a question from the inquiry panel chaired by Suhakam commissioner Khaw Lake Tee whether he would consider it a form of provocation, he responded in the affirmative.

"They were building up the crowd's anger. At 3pm, they stormed the barricades and lifted it out of the way in unison," he said.

At this point, he said in response to the panel's question that Anwar was nowhere to be seen.

However, he stressed that no action was taken by the police until the protesters stormed the barricades, resulting in the police issuing several warnings via a public address system.

At one point, ACP Jamaluddin Abdul Rahman, who was holding a watching brief for the police, asked Zahari whether he agreed that there was a "hidden agenda", without specifying what he meant.

"There are certain parties trying to take advantage of the situation (to create chaos at the restricted area)," replied Zahari.

He also believed that the storming of the barricade was pre-planned, as the protesters moved the barricade out of the way together and came prepared with pieces of cloth to protect their hands when throwing scalding hot tear gas shells back at the police.

When the three warnings of "Disperse immediately or we will take action," went unheeded, the water cannon trucks went into action, firing plain water at the protesters.

However, he could not give the exact timing of the warnings, only that, "When they retreat, we keep quiet. When they get rowdy again, we give another warning."

When asked by the panel, he denied that the water cannon opened fire immediately after the third warning was given, but a grace period was given for the protesters to comply with the orders to disperse.

'More warnings given'

Even after the water cannons had opened fire, more warnings were given before further action was taken.

However, the protesters simply fell back, regrouped, and advanced again, some of them hurling pieces of the road curb and sidewalk tiles at the police.

Zahari said the two of the FRU troops, named Four-Alpha and Four-Bravo, then advanced from Dataran Merdeka to the intersection of Jalan Raja Laut and Jalan Tun Perak and held positions there, near the place where the barricades were initially breached.

However, their warnings were still unheeded. At this point, he said, irritants were mixed into the water cannon truck's deluge and tear gas shells were used.

When asked by Bersih coalition's observer Daniel Albert why did the FRU chase the protesters well beyond the court-ordered restricted area around Dataran Merdeka, Zahari said it was because the protesters refused to stand down.

"Every time we take action, they withdraw, regroup, and throw projectiles at us," he said.

He told the panel that he accompanied Troop Four-Alpha as it marched along Jalan Raja Laut and clashing with protesters until they reached the vicinity of Wisma Sime Darby, some 1.3km away.

By then he said, at about 5pm, the crowd had thinned out and no longer pose a threat, and orders were received to fall back to Dataran Merdeka.

When asked by Melissa Sasidaran, who was holding a watching brief for the Bar Council, he agreed that the public announcement system may not have been effective in issuing warnings because some may not hear it if the atmosphere was noisy, and that banners may be more useful.

He further added that using banners to issue warnings are in fact an optional part of standard operating procedures (SOP). However, they were not used during the Bersih 3.0 rally because problems with procurement had delayed their delivery.

"Even when they did arrive, the translations (from Bahasa Malaysia) were wrong," he said.

The banners were supposed to read "Disperse, or we will disperse you," in several languages, including Chinese and Tamil.

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