

Ex-CID chief: PM's claim on Bersih is baseless

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By Abdul Rahim Sabri

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's claim that Bersih 3.0 rally was an attempt to overthrow the government is "loose and baseless", said former Bukit Aman CID director Fauzi Shaari.

During an interview at his home last Friday, Fauzi speculated that Najib had made an assumption based on unreliable information.

"Based on what happened, I can say that the statement (by the premier) was loose. It was very loose and not based on clear facts.

"Perhaps (he made the statements) based on information that is not verified," said Fauzi, who had served the force for 32 years.

Fauzi was commenting on the premier's claim that the rally was a platform for a Arab Spring-style attempt to topple the government masterminded by Pakatan Rakyat.

Najib had used this to justify the harsh crackdown during the rally, which saw scores of protesters and journalists needing medical attention.

Prior to the enactment of the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012, the police would often deny the right to peaceful assemblies on grounds of that it might be a threat to public order, said Fauzi.

However, the same reason can no longer apply to the current situation as the people have become more mature and open.

"(With regard to Najib's claim) my opinion is that if we want to be fair, we should hear some (of the views from Bersih)," said Fauzi, who was once the district police chief of Dang Wangi - one of the areas that have encountered many street demonstrations.

'Chaos could have been avoided'

Commenting further, Fauzi pointed out that if the police and Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) had allowed the 100,000 demonstrators to enter Dataran Merdeka in the first place, the chaos might not have happened.

The failure for both sides to reach a consensus before the rally had already created a confrontational scenario which led to the chaos on that day, he concluded.

"If we (the police) had given them the freedom of speech and the right to assembly for the purpose of enhancing democracy, (if the police) had practiced openness, I believe the situation would have been peaceful.

"If we had an understanding and respect each other, why couldn't we give a chance (to Bersih)? They came in peace. We should sacrifice. The federal government, state government, and the police should sacrifice, by giving them (Bersih) a say," he added.

Fauzi said all quarters need to find a consensus to avoid chaos, and consider rallies as a legitimate exercise allowed by the federal constitution.

Asked if the outcome would be different if he had been given the responsibility to handle the rally, Fauzi laughed and replied that the same things might have happened.

"Maybe at that time, my thoughts would be that we (the police) are one team. We cannot (act) alone. When we have decided on a decision (to disperse the crowd), even if (the views of different police officers) contradict each other, we (should) unite (based on one instruction)," he explained.

'SOP is dynamic'

To a question on whether the police have a standard operating procedure (SOP) for crowd control, he said the SOP is dynamic and is applied according to the situation.

"It means the SOP depends on the suitability of the venue and situation. If we really cannot (control and) the situation is like this, then we do this; if the situation is like that, then we do that, generally speaking."

Fauzi stressed that the issue is not whether the police have followed the SOP but the conflicting stands between the authority and the organisers even before the rally.

Both sides were adamant on to defend their positions - the police were determined to keep protesters away from Dataran Merdeka while the protesters insisted that it was their right to be there.

Asked whether the alleged police brutality against the participants and journalists during the rally was part of the SOP, Fauzi said such violent actions infringes upon the law.

"If is it like what you said, beating people, then it is wrong under our rules. We cannot punish... (Beating people) is like a punishment," he said.

However, Fauzi pointed out that the SOP allows police to make arrests if the participants refuse to leave the scene after being dispersed to stop them from rallying again.

In his 32 years in the police force, Fauzi held various senior posts, including that of Sarawak police chief (2001-2003) and Selangor police chief (2004-2005).

He went on to head the CID at Bukit Aman in 2005 and retired the following year.