

Bersih: 'Explain conflicting directives during rally'

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By Sara Ghazie

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) has urged the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) to call upon authorities such as deputy inspector-general of police Khalid Abu Bakar and Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein to assist the tribunal.

This is for the two to explain whether they gave two sets of directives on the handling of the mammoth April 28 rally.

Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan said she wants the duo to explain what were their orders given to the police that day.

"One was to initially treat us (participants) with care, and I think that some of the police (officers) have come up and said that. We agree that initially, before 2pm, the police were excellent and we had no issues about how they behave," she said.

"There was a second set of orders, it appeared. It was after the firing of the tear gas and it unleashed terror upon the participants of the rally and we cannot understand how that happened," she explained.

She told a room of about 15 reporters that it is important for Bersih and the Suhakam panel to know what orders were given to police personnel.

According to her, they have only heard evidence given from one group of police officers with one set of orders and she wants to hear evidence given by the other group.

Bersih also wants to know who gave the second set of orders to the police, who had beat up the rally's participants and what the orders were.

Not only that, Bersih wants Suhakam to investigate cases of police personnel allegedly dressed in yellow Bersih T-shirts, such as who were involved and their purpose in doing so.

Ambiga was representing Bersih at Suhakam's HQ in Kuala Lumpur at around 2pm today to hand over a memorandum on violations of human rights during the latest Bersih rally.

The lawyer gave examples of the violations of human rights, such as no initial warning being given to Bersih participants before the launching of tear gas canisters, excessive deployment of tear gas which was disproportionate to what was taking place, and a clear picture of police brutality and abuse of power.

She also said that Suhakam inquiries should go beyond just hearing witnesses and police personnel that they (Suhakam and Bersih) chose but also getting a more holistic view of everything that took place on that day.

"More in-depth inquiries should be held and those who gave orders on that day must testify to assist in the investigation," she told the media before submitting the memorandum to Suhakam.

Women's Aid Organisation executive director Ivy Josiah, vocal NGO organisation WargaAman secretary-general S Barathidasan and Movement for Change, Sarawak (MoCS) leader Francis Siah were also present with Ambiga during the submission.

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