

## **Onslaught against Turun 'repeat of Bersih'**

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As the New Year's Eve anti-price hike demonstration nears, the government machinery has descended on social activists behind the protest with authorities accusing them of attempting to overthrow the government.

Organisers say the protest at Dataran Merdeka, dubbed "rally to reduce prices", is aimed at turning the heat on the government for raising prices on fuel, sugar, electricity and several other essential goods and services.

However, organisers have faced an avalanche of police reports and more recently, a declaration by Kuala Lumpur deputy police chief Amar Singh that protesters are planning to bring weapons and hand grenades to the rally.

For Turun chief Azan Safar, who will be leading the protest, all this sound eerily familiar as they unfold in similar chronology during the Bersih 2.0 and Bersih 3.0 rallies in 2011 and 2012.

"This is the same tactic in previous rallies used to discredit the protests," he told Malaysiakini when contacted.

He added that the government was attempting to divert attention away from having to justify the series of price hikes.

Azan reiterated the protest will be a peaceful assembly but warned opponents against attempt to sabotage the rally.

Bersih: They did the same to us

In 2011, over 2,000 police reports were lodged against the Bersih 2.0 rally and two days before the protest on July 9, the same police officer, Amar (left), laid out a row of parangs and molotov cocktails which he indicated was linked to the demonstration organisers.

"Like Turun, the government also accused us of wanting to topple the government after we organised Bersih 3.0 rally in 2012," said Bersih chairperson Maria Chin Abdullah when contacted.

Bersih had sued Umno-linked New Straits Times over the claim, and the daily

subsequently apologised.

Despite similar modus operandi against Bersih in the past, Maria said she was puzzled that the government would still try the same with Turun.

"They (government) must know people will not buy into these kind of tactics. People are smarter and have more access to information.

"It would be better for the government to learn and answer questions intelligently instead of going crazy like this," he said.

'Legitimate issues'

She added that, Turun, like Bersih, were raising clear and legitimate issues that concern the rakyat.

Shortly after the Turun's protest was announced, a mysterious banner was circulated on social media which advertised an event called "rally to topple the government" and carried the same venue and date as the anti-price hike protest.

This prompted BN grassroots leaders and Umno-linked NGO to lodge an avalanche of police reports, which now stands at over 1,000.

Police quickly swung into action, arresting protest leader Azan Turun for attempting activities detrimental to parliamentary democracy, but was later forced to release him after failing to obtain a remand.

The cops also attempted to arrest Badrul Hisham Shaharin of Solidariti Anak Muda Malaysia (SAMM), another backer of the protest, however, he was abroad.

Despite the activists repeatedly insisting that their protest is focused on the price hikes and nothing more, the government-linked media has gleefully played along, using the term "rally to topple the government" when making references to them.

Top cap it off, pro-Umno blogs yesterday published an email under the name of "Abdul Rahim Ghouse", an ally of Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim, to PKR strategies director Rafizi Ramli.

The email, titled "C for Chaos" claimed that there will be "minor explosions" on that day which can be used to blame the government.

Abdul Rahim has denied being the author of the letter while Rafizi called it a "bad

play".

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