

**Wisma Putra Rebukes Wall Street Journal Editorial  
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KUALA LUMPUR -- The Foreign Ministry has rebuked a Wall Street Journal editorial titled "Crackdown 2.0 in Malaysia", which states that protesters suffered "intimidation and repression" at the hands of the government in recent weeks.

In a letter to the New York-based Wall Street Journal (WSJ), Wisma Putra denied the accusation that protesters had suffered "intimidation and repression" at the hands of the government in the build-up to the rally.

In the editorial, "Crackdown 2.0 in Malaysia", published on July 12, WSJ described the handling of the rally as an "atmosphere of fear and repression" and the government's response to the "peaceful rally" as "brutal".

However, Wisma Putra in the letter which was published by the WSJ's Letters to the Editor column on Friday, explained that Malaysians have a constitutional right to peaceful assembly and throughout the build-up to last weekend's protest Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak worked to find a solution that would allow Bersih to exercise that right.

"This included offering the use of a large-capacity stadium where the event could be held safely and without disrupting the lives and businesses of ordinary Malaysians.

"Sadly the protest organisers chose to reject this offer, instead calling on supporters to assemble at a much smaller stadium 'come what may', despite the fact that it was unavailable," said Ahmad Rozian, Undersecretary of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the letter.

The Wisma Putra letter also explained that the police were forced to intervene to disperse the crowd as thousands of people were attempting to enter an unsuitable venue in a densely populated area and the presence of small minority protesters intent on violence.

"It goes without saying that Malaysia's police officers are expected to maintain the highest standards of professional conduct, and any specific allegations of heavy-handed behaviour will be thoroughly investigated.

"However, to claim that Saturday's events (illegal rally on July 9) mean Malaysia is not a 'true democracy' is simply wrong. As the strong performance of opposition parties in the last general election demonstrates, the ballot box remains the most powerful force in Malaysian politics," concluded Wisma Putra in the letter.

Meanwhile, WSJ in a separate column on Friday carried a correction which reads: "The Malaysian government offered the Bersih rally the use of the Malawati Stadium. A July 12 editorial, 'Crackdown 2.0 in Malaysia', stated that Prime Minister Najib Razak had withdrawn his offer of a stadium.

(Bernama)

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