

False Promises Designed To Break-Up Bersih 3.0

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Malaysians should cast their minds back to June last year, when Prime minister Najib Abdul Razak gave the Bersih 2.0 organisers the run-around, whilst making covert attempts to prevent the March for Democracy from happening.

He is attempting to do the same for Bersih 3.0 this year. His reforms have not gone far enough and his promises to the rakyat are unfulfilled.

Just remember the underhand tactics Najib and his government adopted to derail Bersih 2.0. These should be sufficient to make our resolve greater to have Bersih 3.0 at Dataran Merdeka on Saturday 28 April.

In June 2011, Najib gave organisers of Bersih 2.0 the go-ahead, but at the same time he told his Home minister Hishammuddin Hussein to ban the Bersih march. These two men called Bersih 2.0 illegal and refused to meet its leaders. They then placed the Agong in an invidious position thus compromising his political neutrality.

On 5 July 2011, Najib agreed that Bersih 2.0 could demonstrate in a stadium. He said: "I understand Bersih wants to have a meeting with the government on having the rally in a stadium (and) we are ready to meet them."

There were conditions the organisers had to agree on: "(They must) go peacefully, assemble peacefully and leave peacefully."

Despite adopting this conciliatory tone, Najib then retracted his earlier promise.

He back-pedalled and said: "I didn't say I will meet Bersih. Yesterday I said the government will meet (them). The government doesn't mean me, personally".

There was no sincerity in his actions because he said that permission could only be given to organisations that had been registered. He said, "Bersih is illegal. It has never been registered".

Last year, Najib displayed his true colours when he failed to keep his promise. He dithered, flip-flopped and prevaricated. The tension was building and he exacerbated the situation because thousands of people were ready to descend on Kuala Lumpur.

Was this was a deliberate ploy in the hope that the Bersih organisers would cancel the event? Did he hope extremist groups would provoke the marchers and so he could clamp emergency rule in Malaysia and blame Bersih 2.0 for the unrest?

As it turned out, his policemen were the ones who reacted with violence against a peaceful crowd. The Najib administration underestimated the resolve of the rakyat.

In 2011, the Cabinet bandied together with the Deputy Prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin claiming that Malaysia's reputation would be tarnished because the proposed Bersih rally was politically motivated and a threat to national security.

Muhyiddin made wild exaggerations about tourists staying away and investors avoiding Malaysia because "our image globally as a peaceful and developed country' would be tarnished.

The government went into overdrive. Policemen arrested 30 Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) members on suspicion of reviving communism and "waging war against the monarch". They exhibited their haul of T-shirts bearing images of former Malayan communists amongst literature on Bersih 2.0 and PSM policies.

Notwithstanding this, the government also claimed that Bersih 2.0 was funded by Christian groups from abroad.

Meanwhile, pro-government supporters issued death threats against participants and key-members of Bersih 2.0. The poet laureate was detained for questioning because his poems criticised the government.

With publicity gaining momentum, at home and abroad, the authorities targeted overseas students. In Adelaide, circulars warned Malaysian students that they would be severely reprimanded if they were to join the rally on 9th July.

People going about their daily activities were not spared either; such was the panic amongst the police, that people wearing yellow T-shirts bearing the 'Bersih 2' logo were arrested.

Hasbeemasputra Abu Bakar, from Suaram, told AFP: "The police have arrested three more election activists today for distributing Bersih 2.0 T-shirts. This means that more than 150 people have so far been detained by authorities over the rally".

When the government's preventive measures failed, the Information and Culture Minister Rais Yatim decided that the Bersih 2.0 rally could not be held in any stadium within Kuala Lumpur, but that rallies could be held in opposition-held states of Selangor, Penang, Kelantan and Kedah.

He said, "Their application to hold the rally in Kuala Lumpur, such as in Stadium Merdeka, Stadium Negara and Stadium Bukit Jalil will not be entertained."

With a few days left before Bersih 2.0, observers were pessimistic about the march taking place.

Opposition to Bersih 2.0 also came from Umno Youth when its information chief, Reezal Merican Naina Merican, said: "We reject Stadium Merdeka. It is not a place for a political gathering. Do in Pakatan Rakyat (administered) state. Furthermore, Stadium Shah Alam was already offered". (sic.)

Various scare-tactics failed to stop Bersih 2.0. The rest, as you know, is history.

Today, in the run-up to Bersih 3.0, the police have again rejected a request by the organisers to have their sit-down protest at Dataran Merdeka on Saturday. They cited "safety reasons" but declined to elaborate, despite the Home minister's claim that Bersih 3.0 was not dangerous and "of little impact".

A young Malaysian who is eagerly awaiting Bersih 3.0 said, "Bersih 3.0 will be held at Dataran Merdeka.

"It was there that the Union Jack was lowered and the Malayan flag hoisted at midnight on 31 August, 1957.

"Next Saturday, Dataran Merdeka will witness another historic occasion. That is when we will re-assert our right to clean, free and fair elections."

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(The views expressed above belongs to the author in its entirety and does not represent the opinion of Malaysian Mirror in any way)

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