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# 'Illegal rally not Malaysian way'

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FACE the consequences. This is the warning from Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to those intending to take part in today's rally by "Elections Reform Coalition" (Bersih) at Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur.

The prime minister said a confrontation could occur since the organisers wanted to proceed with the illegal gathering despite police's refusal to issue a permit.

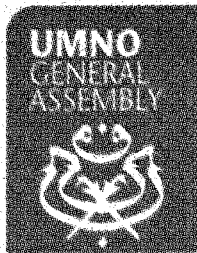
"Usually when the police say no and they still go ahead with it, surely something bad is going to happen. Look at what happened in Terengganu," he said, referring to the Batu Buruk incident in which two opposition supporters were injured after Bersih held a ceramah without a police permit.

He said what happened in Terengganu was unacceptable and the "wild" behaviour of the rioters was not the Malaysian way of practising democracy.

"They are challenging the patience of the rakyat who want this country to be peaceful and stable. That is what they are challenging, not me."

Abdullah said when police took action against demonstrators, they would run into shops, stalls and cause a rampage, resulting in businesses shutting down.

"It is them (the demonstrators causing a disturbance) and not the police. If they follow the law, these things would not happen," he said.



Abdullah said the government had to safeguard the people's freedom of movement and security, and that demonstrations must not be a nuisance to others.

"People must not be afraid. The shop owners must be able to operate freely and not be troubled (by illegal gatherings)," he said.

The Umno president said taking to the streets was not the way to demand change.

"The people are able to make changes in a peaceful manner. It is a weekend and people want to go out with their families; they are causing problems for the people," he said in his winding-up speech at the Umno general assembly yesterday.

At a press conference later, Abdullah said the gathering, if it took place, would be asked to disperse.

"As I have stressed, they must have permits issued by the police. The police make assessments before deciding if permits should be issued. A 'no' is a 'no'," he said.

The prime minister said some of the opposition's demands had been met by the

Elections Commission, such as providing transparent ballot boxes and the use of indelible ink. "They always like to put the blame on the EC but when they knew they could not win in an election, they decide to boycott it, as in the case of the Batu Talam by-election.

"But they entered candidates in Machap and Ijok because they thought they could win," said Abdullah. The BN won both by-elections.

He said the BN had accepted its defeats, including in Kelantan, and was prepared to face the people again in the coming general election.

"How could the opposition claim the EC is unfair to them when they formed the state government in Kelantan, then lost to the Alliance and came back to power? We want the people to tell us what they want. The people in Kelantan did not want us, what could we do?"

This, Abdullah said, was testimony that the EC was not controlled by the BN. Abdullah was also asked at the press conference whether the demonstration could lead to a possible crackdown similar to Myanmar's. His response: "Malaysia is not Myanmar".

On the Human Rights Watch statement that Malaysia should "begin to uphold constitutional guarantees of free speech and assembly if it wanted to count itself a democracy", Abdullah said the country's laws must also be respected and observed.