

## US breaks silence over clampdown on Bersih rally

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KUALA LUMPUR, Jul 14: The United States broke its silence yesterday over the crackdown by Malaysian authorities on the election reforms coalition Bersih and the police assault on protesters last Saturday.

"We do have some concerns," State Department spokesman Mark Toner (**right**) was quoted as saying by *Agence France Presse*.

"We... continue to stand for the right for people to freely express their democratic aspirations and express their views freely."

"I would stress that those must be peaceful demonstrations," Toner said. "We continue to monitor the situation closely."



Videos and images have crowded news portals and blogs as well as on Twitter and Facebook pages, showing police brutality to quell the massive rally called by Bersih on July 9 in Kuala Lumpur.

Prime minister Najib Razak has denied that police acted aggressively, and poked fun at injuries suffered by Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim, describing him as "play acting".

More than 1,600 people were arrested during the rally, scores had been injured while one protestor died.



Earlier, rights group Amnesty International called on the British government to speak out against Najib's administration over the way it handled peaceful protests. Najib is currently on an official visit to Britain.

The US comments are set to rile up UMNO leaders, who have taken pains in repairing strained ties since prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad's era, due to international condemnations of the crackdown on reformasi protesters.

One of Najib's first foreign policy initiatives after assuming power in 2009 was to have closer ties with Washington. Among others, the government was said to have engaged Israeli-linked international consultancy firm Apco to arrange for Najib's meeting with president Barack Obama in April last year.

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