

Purported anti-Bersih script surfaces online
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The media were to highlight that the Bersih assembly was illegal. — file pic

KUALA LUMPUR, July 11 — Popular website Malaysia Today today leaked what appears to be a letter from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) with guidelines on how to demonise Bersih in the run-up to last Saturday's rally.

The letter, ostensibly issued on June 17 and signed by national communications head Jalil Hamid, said such treatment was necessary because the rally "will certainly go beyond issues of fair and free elections" to inflation, Teoh Beng Hock and even the controversial Lynas plant.

Attempts by *The Malaysian Insider* to contact Jalil and other senior press officers of the prime minister's department were unsuccessful.

"The protest, if not countered, could undermine the government, the economy and national security. This note sets out the policy guidance and the do's and don'ts in managing the issue," the guideline released by Malaysia Today this morning read.

In the guidance note, it states it was written up following an Umno political bureau meeting to discuss Bersih and was also circulated to bureau members, the letter said.

In it, the PMO reminded media outlets to discredit Bersih and its leaders as "a group of politicians and politically-inclined individuals who lack credibility" and to stress that the rally was an "illegal assembly".

Bersih was also to be painted as a front for the opposition or foreign agents as well as an attempt by opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to find an undemocratic and unconstitutional "shortcut to Putrajaya".

Media were told to highlight stories of how businesses, tourists and ordinary people would be affected; question Bersih's funding; target Anwar, Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan and "budak suruhan DSAI and tali barut DAP" (Anwar and DAP's lackey) Mohamad Sabu; and use file photos of Ambiga with opposition leaders to highlight their close association.

The press were also instructed to use fewer old faces like Datuk Zulkifli Nordin and Datuk Ibrahim Ali as "attack dogs" in favour of fresh Barisan Nasional (BN) Youth leaders and non-governmental organisations; mobilise friendly bloggers; and play up images of ugly street demonstrations in other countries.

The do's and don'ts detailed were:

- * [The home minister, Inspector-General of Police, Deputy Inspector-General] and Internal Security and Public Order Director are to brief media editors at KDN (Home Ministry). The meeting was to reinforce the branding as "perhimpunan haram" (illegal assembly), and that Bersih is an unlawful organisation and the perpetrators are out to create chaos.

- * KDN, which has jurisdiction over all print media, needs to exert its authority in ensuring the press toe the line.

- * Confine politicians to just making political statements. Let the police do their job.

- * PDRM can start calling up Bersih organisers based on the hundreds of police reports lodged so far.

- * Encourage the use of third party validators.

- * Pre-empt chaos and disorder (fear paradigm). The "show of force" by Umno or silat groups well before July 9 may be imperative to deter demonstrators.

- * The soundbytes in our favour MUST come from across the country and across the ethnic lines. The soundbytes should not just be confined to the Malays or those residing in the Klang Valley.

- * We must not allow the rally to be exploited by international elements.

- * As a pre-emptive measure, the authorities should stop the launch of Perhimpunan Bersih 2.0 scheduled for June 19 at the Chinese Assembly Hall. Likewise, a related Perkasa event called "Lawan Perhimpunan Bersih" at the Sultan Sulaiman Club on the same day should also be halted.

- * [EC] should counter Bersih demands for free and fair elections by highlighting the various initiatives it has undertaken so far. Use the highly successful Sarawak PRN as its model. It should not meet up with Bersih people.

The letter said the goal of the exercise was to neutralise opposition noise, reinforce the view that public sentiment is not with Bersih and the opposition, send a strong message that the government is in full control of the situation and avoid adverse impact on investor confidence in Malaysia.

Bersih claimed a turnout of 50,000 for Saturday's street demonstration, which went ahead without police permission after protracted negotiation with the authorities.

The coalition of 62 NGOs took to the streets despite previously accepting Najib's offer to move the street rally to a stadium, after the government refused to allow the gathering to take place in Stadium Merdeka.

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