

## EC praises BN for 'responsible' approach to reform suggestions

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Members of the audience react during today's public dialogue. — Picture by Choo Choy May

SHAH ALAM, July 26 — The Election Commission (EC) today praised Barisan Nasional (BN) for maintaining a non-hostile approach when suggesting possible electoral reforms to the commission.

EC deputy chairman Datuk Wira Wan Ahmad Wan Omar said that this was in stark contrast to the actions of Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers, who he claimed irresponsibly portrayed the commission in a bad light.

"BN has never attacked or put down the EC, that is the difference between PAS, DAP, PKR and BN.

"BN will criticise us when they meet us but they will not resort to using the media to openly chastise us ... but you, sirs, use the media and stab us," he said to a chorus of boos and jeers during a public dialogue with Bersih chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan today.

Wan Ahmad said this in response to criticism that the EC had acted in a "defensive" manner when addressing Bersih's reform demands when it should have remained neutral instead.

"Your tone, even in the EC handbook, contains partisan language," commented IDEAS chairman Wan Saiful Wan Jan, who was the moderator for the dialogue.

"The EC is defending itself. We have been attacked left, right and centre. You cannot expect us to remain quiet," said an exasperated-looking Wan Ahmad.

Bersih claimed that 50,000 people showed up for its rally despite efforts to prevent the gathering from taking place. Police said the number was closer to 6,000.

The protest turned chaotic when police fired tear gas and water cannons at demonstrators, resulting in nearly 1,700 arrests, scores injured and the death of former military man Baharuddin Ahmad, 59.

The government has promised to investigate allegations of police brutality while the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) will hold a separate public inquiry into police conduct during the rally.

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