

## **Bersih rally lost direction, says Hishammuddin**

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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, July 9 — Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein thanked the police tonight for keeping the Bersih 2.0 rally under control and claimed the group's electoral reform agenda has been outshined by Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) political propaganda.

In a statement, the home minister said this afternoon's events clearly showed that the group's criticisms against the Election Commission (EC) had failed to emerge as the primary purpose of today's rally.

"The question of the EC no longer arises. Instead, it is the involvement of opposition party leaders that became more pronounced than the agenda they claimed to have before this.

"They (protestors) shouted 'Reformasi' and wreaked havoc. This gathering clearly lost its direction and its organisers must be held responsible for the events that occurred," he said.



Hishammuddin (**picture**)

also said the group had defied the Yang di-Pertuan Agong's advice by insisting on staging its rally in Stadium Merdeka, pointing out that the government had already agreed that the event could be held in any stadium outside the capital.

"To the very end, this group clearly did not take the initiative to assemble peacefully at a specific location although the government repeatedly gave its assurance they could meet anywhere, any stadium outside of Kuala Lumpur," he said.

The Umno vice-president claimed that opposition leaders today were "hoping" to be arrested by the police in order to cast the authorities in a bad light.

"The opposition only wants Malaysia to be seen as unstable and at the end, this will only bring negative effects to our economy and topple a democratically-elected government," he said.

Of the thousands that turned up at today's rally, a total of 1,401 were arrested, including prominent leaders like Bersih 2.0 chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan and PAS president Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang.

Hishammuddin thanked the thousands of riot police deployed across the city centre today, saying they had acted within their jurisdiction when they clamped down hard on protestors.

He expressed relief that none of the untoward incidences he had feared had occurred, and credited the police for this, saying they were "brave, fair and prudent".

The cops, he pointed out, had wisely pre-empted possible violence during today's march and had rightfully confiscated a multitude of weapons like explosives and chemicals ahead of the event.

"My worry over the likelihood of third-party interferences, including foreign associations, did not occur and had no chance to occur because of the police's diligence.

"We are thankful because the police managed to keep the situation under control and stop those with differing views from clashing today. Their actions prevented clashes, serious injuries and loss of lives," he said.

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