

Najib says Bersih 2.0 could have been like Himpun
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By Melissa Chi

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23 — The Bersih 2.0 rally would have avoided chaos if it had been held in a stadium like Himpunan Sejuta Umat (Himpun), Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today.

“I want to congratulate them because the rally yesterday was conducted in a controlled manner and that was my wish when the government offered a stadium to Bersih 2.0 for their rally.

“So compare the chaos during Bersih 2.0 and yesterday’s rally, the two were very different and there wasn’t anyone who felt harassed, and nobody felt pressured or threatened at the rally,” he told reporters after attending a gathering of police pensioners and former policemen here at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC).

About 5,000 people turned up for the rally yesterday in the 100,000-seat Shah Alam Stadium.

Bersih, on the other hand, has claimed some 50,000 people took part in its street demonstration on July 9 but official police figures placed the number closer to 6,000. Approximately 1,700 people were arrested, scores were injured and an ex-soldier died at the street rally.

About 5,000 people are estimated to have turned up for the Himpun rally yesterday. — file pic

The government disclosed in Parliament this month it had spent RM2 million and deployed 11,000 police personnel to handle the rally, and has since formed a bipartisan parliamentary select committee to look into electoral improvements including cleaning up the electoral roll.

The prime minister had offered a stadium to Bersih, but disclosed later that it had to be at a location outside KL, which was considered not ideal by Bersih organisers.

“It also mirrors what we wanted with the amendment to Section 27 of the Police Act to allow peaceful demonstrations,” Najib said.

He added that the Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Ismail Omar is currently reviewing the Act with the Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein in order to proffer the best solution for a country that practises a “modern and progressive democracy” to balance individual rights and public interest as well as keep the peace at the same time.

Himpun was organised by various right-wing religious groups calling for Muslims to rise up and fight the “challenge of Christianisation”.

The mass rally was mooted following the controversial August 3 raid by Selangor Islamic authorities on Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC), where it was alleged that Christians were attempting to convert Muslims.

It is illegal to proselytise Muslims in Malaysia.

Christian leaders have denied the claims and have called Himpun's fight "irrelevant".

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