

## **Comparing Bersih to UK riots shallow, says Umno leader**

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**By Boo Su-Lyn**

PETALING JAYA, Aug 15 — Deputy Higher Education Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah contradicted his Umno colleagues today and said it was “shallow” to liken the July 9 Bersih rally to the last week’s UK riots.

The outspoken Umno supreme council member added that such an argument reflected badly on Barisan Nasional (BN).

“You can’t give shallow excuses because the new social consciousness will be asking you, ‘What? Bersih is equal to riots in UK?’” Saifuddin told The Malaysian Insider today.

“Why they do it is different, the people who join are different, the way they do it is different,” he said when comparing the differences between the Bersih rally and the recent riots in the United Kingdom.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak reportedly said last Friday that the riots in the UK justified the clampdown on the massive July 9 rally for electoral reforms.

Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein told Malaysians last Thursday to be thankful that the Bersih rally did not end up becoming violent like the riots in London and other major English cities.

Today, Saifuddin also pointed out that the students who demonstrated in the UK last November were not looters, drawing further distinctions between demonstrations and riots.

“The demonstration... is against the (university) fee hike. They’re not looters; they’re not hooligans,” said the Temerloh MP.

Saifuddin had previously criticised the government for failing to discuss terms with Bersih 2.0 electoral reforms movement before the July 9 rally here, warning that Najib would suffer a political backlash from the rally.

The recent London riots had spread across Britain with reports of youths looting shops and torching cars and buildings.

Community leaders there said the violence in London, the worst for decades in the multi-ethnic capital of 7.8 million people, was rooted in growing disparities in wealth and opportunity.

But after the first three nights, London alone saw just 450 arrests, and arrests nationwide had just breached 1,200 last Thursday.

In Malaysia, opposition leaders and human rights activists have accused police of using excessive force to clamp down on the Bersih march for free and fair elections, claiming that police fired tear gas directly at demonstrators, in acts they termed as “attempted murder.”

The electoral reform movement had initially accepted the Najib administration’s offer to move its street rally to a stadium but it was denied its choice of Stadium Merdeka.

The coalition of 62 NGOs then took to the streets to march to the historic venue, defying warnings of police action, which finally resulted in nearly 1,700 arrests, scores injured and one ex-soldier dead.

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