

Ambiga maintains Bersih marchers forced into Tung Shin
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 5 — Bersih 2.0 chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan welcomed Putrajaya's admission last night that riot police had crossed guidelines when they chased after marchers into Tung Shin Hospital grounds here on July 9.

"It confirms what the public already knew," said the prominent lawyer, who was last month conferred France's top civilian honour for her fierce defence of human rights in Malaysia.

However, she told The Malaysian Insider she disagreed with the federal government's findings that claimed "the protestors were wrongfully there at the hospital".

"They had no choice when the police set upon them unnecessarily," she said, adding the 62-member coalition demanding free and fair elections will wait for the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) to conduct its independent inquiry.

The three-man panel, to be chaired by Suhakam vice-chairman Prof Datuk Dr Khaw Lake Tee, will kick off the public inquiry on October 12. Their objective is to determine if there had been violations of human rights and police brutality during the rally.

Ambiga congratulated a group of doctors from the private Chinese hospital for speaking up and forcing the issue to remain alive.

Tung Shin Hospital in Jalan Pudu here was one of the rally points for thousands of Bersih supporters and bore testimony of the harsh measures taken to disperse the crowds when police officers in full riot gear shot tear gas and chemical-laced water cannons at its compound.

Many of the demonstrators were civilians and had fled into the hospital for shelter and treatment, only to have the police chase after them.

Close to 1,700 people were arrested, scores were injured and an ex-soldier died in the street rally.

Bersih has claimed some 50,000 people took part in the street demonstration but official police figures placed the number closer to 6,000.

The government disclosed in Parliament this week it had spent RM2 million and deployed 11,000 police to handle the rally.

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