

**Now Najib says offered Bersih 'stadium in Shah Alam'**  
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**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 12 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today he had specifically offered election watchdog Bersih the option of having its rally in "a stadium in Shah Alam" before July 9.

"We are regretful that the offer made by the government (to Bersih) to have its gathering in a stadium in Shah Alam was not accepted by the (rally) organisers.

"This offer was never denied or retracted by the government. We wanted to avoid any untoward incidences from happening," he told reporters today after a Barisan Nasional (BN) meeting.

The prime minister had previously disclosed that that he had considered Shah Alam stadium when he offered a venue to Bersih for the July 9 rally.

Najib, however, never specified which stadium Bersih could hold the July 9 rally in when he made the offer.

He praised the police today for ensuring peace and order on July 9, and said that the government's action in outlawing Bersih was justified, saying the recent London riots proved how demonstrations could get out of control.

"It is the best move to avoid any incidents which can lead to riots, like burning shops or attacking people.

"In a street demonstration or assembly, there is no guarantee that everyone has a peaceful assembly in mind... There might be those with bad intentions; when there are big street demonstrations, riots can happen and we cannot say this is not possible," he added.

Opposition leaders and human rights activists have accused the police of using excessive force to clamp down on the Bersih march for free and fair elections. They further claimed that police fired tear gas directly at demonstrators, which they termed "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 still 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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