

Bersih 2.0: Najib never specified Shah Alam in stadium offer
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 13 — Election watchdog Bersih 2.0 disputed Datuk Seri Najib Razak's claim yesterday that he had specifically offered "a stadium in Shah Alam" for its July 9 rally.

Steering committee member Maria Chin Abdullah reminded the prime minister today that he had never named a stadium when he made the offer to the coalition just days before the mammoth event.

"That offer only came from Selangor Menteri Besar (Tan Sri) Khalid Ibrahim, not from the PM. Najib never said which stadium... he only said a stadium. Perhaps we were expected to read his mind," she told The Malaysian Insider when contacted this afternoon.

Maria Chin (picture) was commenting on Najib's statement to the press yesterday that he had specifically offered Bersih 2.0 use of a stadium in Shah Alam to hold its rally and had never retracted the offer.

"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 incidents from happening," he had said.

Maria Chin recalled that the stadium offer was made following the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin's surprising decree on July 3, calling for all warring parties to reach a mutual agreement over Bersih 2.0's electoral reform demands.

A check on media reports of the sequence of events in the run-up to the tumultuous July 9 rally revealed that Najib had not expressly named any stadium in Shah Alam when he made the offer.

In one media report on July 3, Najib was quoted as saying: "We are willing to provide a stadium for them to rally but why choose to protest in the streets. The government is not against them rallying in a stadium from morning until night. Just don't hold street protest as it is very risky to the nation."

Following the offer, Bersih 2.0 announced its request to meet with the King and upon emerging from Istana Negara on July 5 said it would proceed with the rally and accept the government's stadium offer.

After Bersih's audience with Tuanku Mizan, Najib said his administration was willing to meet with Bersih to decide on a venue but stressed that the offer would be conditional as it would depend on the group's willingness to ensure the gathering would be peaceful.

The following day, Khalid offered Bersih 2.0 use of the Shah Alam stadium but urged for discipline, order and control should the event be hosted in Selangor.

But Bersih 2.0 declined and named the iconic Stadium Merdeka as its choice. Its suggestion

was immediately rejected by Cabinet for two reasons — the group is not registered with the Registrar of Societies (RoS) and safety concerns.

“I myself have checked with all the media reports — like I said, Najib never told us which stadium when he first made the offer,” Maria Chin insisted today.

The July 9 rally was held despite Bersih’s tug-of-war with the authorities for Stadium Merdeka and chaos broke out in the capital when the police fired tear gas and water cannons to disperse protestors.

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