

Anti-Bersih slurs un-Islamic, says Umno deputy minister

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By Lisa J. Ariffin



Saifuddin maintains that BN mishandled the Bersih rally on July 9. — file pic

KUALA LUMPUR, July 27 — An Umno deputy minister hit out today at Bersih detractors for using derogatory terms like “monkeys” and “communists” to label the movement’s supporters, saying it was un-Islamic to engage in name-calling.

“We should stop calling people names. Islam does not encourage calling names at other people. Even if you don’t agree, even if I don’t agree with you, I shouldn’t be calling you names because you are a Malaysian citizen, you have your rights,” Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah told reporters today after launching the national conference on management of international students.

Saifuddin, the sole Barisan Nasional (BN) politician who has spoken out against the government on the Bersih issue, instead urged his colleagues in the coalition look into revamping their approach when trying to deal with political dissent in the country.

“I can differ with you two hundred per cent; I don’t have to agree with you all the time, but I shouldn’t be calling you names.

“So we have to have certain kind of decorum when we discuss political issues and I think if we have that kind of mindset, politics will be better. It’s as simple as that,” he said.

Standing his ground today that the Najib administration had mishandled the Bersih rally, he said such matters could be discussed rationally instead of using a confrontational approach.

“I think we need to have a fresher look at politics. We need a new political conversation where people can actually discuss and dialogue rationally and with understanding,” Saifuddin

"I think we mishandled the Bersih rally. I think there were lots of perhaps, misunderstanding or miscommunication within that few days. I think we could have handled it better," he said.

Saiffudin also said social media is the new consciousness particularly among the younger generation.

"Social media makes students belong to a more civil society. That's why (following the Bersih 2.0 rally) there are now more young voters," the deputy minister added.

"(With social media, students) flux. They can form something today, tomorrow they don't have it, next day they have something else. Students understand politics. They know it is not about elections, they want to get involved in politics.

"You can stop the Bersih supporters on the streets. What about those that are participating online? [Are] you going to catch them? Good luck," he said.

With regards to Malaysian students abroad, he said international student organisations no longer flourished as before since their activities can be achieved online.

"Don't be surprised and angry when international students complain of student visa problems, the police, media and anything else online. It is their right to dissent.

"You can stop them from complaining on campus. They explode outside campus. They do it online. This is the new reality we are faced with," he said.

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