

Bersih protesters paid, businesses disrupted

Utusan Malaysia

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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, July 11 — Utusan Malaysia continued today to demonise Bersih 2.0 and its Saturday rally, featuring stories of traders' complaints at having lost millions worth of business that day and claims from participants that they had been paid to attend.

The Umno-owned daily dedicated all its news pages and nearly 30 news articles to Bersih 2.0, all condemning the chaotic events that invaded the streets of the capital city on Saturday.

Quoting Small and Medium Entrepreneurs Association (Ikhlas) president Mohd Ridzuan Abdullah, the daily said some 5,000 traders had recorded losses worth up to RM100 million when they were forced to close for the day due to the rally.

Utusan Malaysia also dubbed the rally an "Indonesian-style demonstration", claiming of revelations from participants that they had been paid to attend.

Citing a police source, the daily said many of the 1,401 arrested on Saturday had revealed to police when giving their statements that between RM150 and RM200 were offered to participants.

"According to the (police) source, many among the participants did not know the purpose of the illegal rally, while others did not even care about its organisers.

"Even more disgusting, said the source, the illegal gathering was planned by certain political parties bent on obstructing the government administration by using participants' provocation of the authorities in charge of maintaining public safety," said the daily.

The source had also purportedly told Utusan Malaysia that the participants were offered allowances several days before Saturday by individuals believed to be from the opposition pact due to their "dialects" and tendency to flare up anti-government sentiments.

Utusan Malaysia also front-paged Datuk Seri Najib Razak's speech from yesterday's Umno gathering, and published several articles, one quoting the prime minister as saying that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim deserved an "Oscar" award for claiming to have been hurt during the rally.

"Not only that, Najib said Anwar's skilful acting was just as good as veteran Bollywood star Amitabh Bachan.

"He only got a little bit of tear gas and there's a neck brace and his face is all contorted as though he got beaten up," the daily quoted Najib as saying.

Saturday's Bersih 2.0 rally saw thousands throng the capital city's streets to march for free and fair elections but close to midday chaos broke out when armed riot police forced back protesters by firing tear gas canisters and water cannons.

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