

Bersih suppression for public good, says Najib
The Malaysian Insider
July 25, 2011



Najib wrote that the country's balance was delicate and always in need of protection. —
file pic

KUALA LUMPUR, July 25 — Still training his sights on Bersih, Datuk Seri Najib Razak today justified his administration's response to the July 9 rally by saying it was the government's duty to safeguard public property and interests.

Making specific reference to May 13, 1969, the prime minister wrote on his blog at 1malaysia.com.my that the country held on to a "delicate balance [that] needs to be protected and preserved at all times."

"Recent events that unfolded in Kuala Lumpur put us through an important test. Our decision as government was to protect the interests and property of the larger community that depend on Kuala Lumpur for their livelihood," Najib continued.

His administration's handling of the Bersih rally has left a blemish on Najib's image as a moderate Muslim leader, with global media delivering harsh criticism over the suppression of the electoral reform movement.

Speaking after his return from an eight-day tour of Europe on Friday, Najib also claimed the Bersih movement was a veiled attempt to topple his administration through street demonstrations akin to those that are now claiming Middle Eastern despots.

"It's not so much about electoral reform. They want to show us as though we're like the Arab Spring governments in the Middle East," he said.

Bersih claimed that 50,000 people showed up for its rally despite efforts to prevent the gathering from taking place. Police said there were 6,000.

The protest turned chaotic when police fired tear gas and water cannons at demonstrators, resulting in nearly 1,700 arrests, scores injured and the death of former military man Baharuddin Ahmad, 59.

The government has promised to investigate allegations of police brutality while the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) will hold a separate public inquiry into police conduct during the rally.

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