

Anwar denies instigating supporters

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PETALING JAYA: Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim denied Monday that he had instigated his supporters to break through the police barriers at Dataran Merdeka on Saturday.

Instead, he claimed he was trying to get the crowd to disperse and move back after he and Bersih co-chairman Datuk S. Ambiga had finished giving their speeches at the rally in Kuala Lumpur.

Anwar also dismissed claims he was gesturing at PKR deputy president Azmin Ali to break through the barriers near Dataran Merdeka.

"I was gesturing at him to negotiate with the police," Anwar told a press conference at the party headquarters here.

In the aftermath of the rally, when protesters clashed with the police, videos have been making rounds in the social media, blogs and news portals, purportedly showing both Azmin and Anwar gesturing at their supporters to break through the metal barriers.

However, Anwar defended the action of the protesters who went against the court order and barged through to Dataran Merdeka, which had been sealed off since Friday.

"Even if some of the youths had broken it, I will defend that decision.

"As a responsible leader, I asked them to turn right and disperse," he said.

Party vice-president Tian Chua, meanwhile, claimed the barriers on the other side of Dataran Merdeka had been breached earlier, even before the ones near Anwar and Azmin.

Chua said, however, that breaching the barriers near Dataran Merdeka was still not excuse for the police to run several blocks away to fire tear gas.

The atmosphere at the press conference turned tense when Anwar became evasive on certain questions about his role during the demonstration.

When asked to comment on Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's call for Bersih and the Opposition to take full responsibility for the damages and injuries that occurred, Anwar said that the Umno leadership was disconnected with the aspirations of demonstrators who attended the rally.

Filmmaker Benji Lim, who had made his way into the press conference, created a stir when he got up and shouted at Anwar in the middle of the function.

"There was no leadership and no crowd control. It was completely hijacked by the Opposition," he said.

An altercation also nearly broke out when several party workers and journalists spoke to Lim, which ended with him shouting: "I'm a citizen too!"

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