

Hisham: Cops to probe alleged aggression against media
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KUALA LUMPUR: The police will investigate every alleged aggression against members of the media during Saturday's assembly in the city centre, said Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein.

They include claims that an Al-Jazeera cameraman was roughed up by the police and that his camera was damaged in the incident.

Hishammuddin noted that as far as the police were concerned, they were responsible for investigating the cases and that it was up to the Attorney-General to frame the charges.

"I have said it very clearly that they should do that (investigate) without fear because we are going into new ground.

"We are allowing an assembly. We are allowing for them to actually do it peacefully but they refused. At the end of the day, we have to balance between national interest, national security, with rights and freedom," he said.

The minister was speaking at a short interview with Al-Jazeera after visiting injured policemen and a pressman, together with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, at the Kuala Lumpur Hospital on Sunday.

He said it was not easy to achieve the desired balance, especially in a society that was in transition, but added "we are moving ahead."

In a related matter, Hishammuddin denied there were 'instructions' for the police to prevent journalists from doing their job during the assembly.

"Because, if there were (instructions), there would have been no footage, at all...and that is in the process of investigation," he said.

Asked for his views on the lack of discipline among policemen during the gathering, Hishammuddin said it had yet to be proven, and urged the public to look at the assembly from the start.

"If (some of) the police (men) are at fault, you cannot blame the entire police force because most of them are well-disciplined.

"You have to look at it, not only in the context of Dataran Merdeka, it was a process from 2am in the morning...in which case, they were moving in," he said.

Hishammuddin explained there were no allegations of indiscipline during the period and the police were very restrained and measured in their approach.

If the police were immature and wanted to use aggression against the protestors, they (police) could have stopped them, way before they reached anywhere near the Dataran Merdeka, he said.

On claims that banning the gathering to be held at the Dataran Merdeka was deemed illegal, according to the newly-approved Peaceful Assembly Act, Hishammuddin said it was done with concern over the security of those in the gathering.

"To say otherwise now, it's an afterthought. Because immediately after the events that took place, she (assembly's co-chairman Datuk S. Ambiga) actually said she could not control the supporters," he noted.

Hishammuddin said, if the organisers took the offer to hold the assembly at the alternative venues, their security would have been well-taken care of. "We gave them the opportunity to stay in the stadium, as long as they wanted. But for reasons known only to them, they decided to turn that down and head to the Dataran Merdeka, instead," he said.

He said the public should not look at Saturday's incident in isolation but as a whole transformation process brought by the prime minister to give them more freedom in voicing out their opinion.

"I hope this is what the voters will be looking at, when deciding the next government," added the minister.

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