

Bersih rally is no threat, has no traction, says minister
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 19 — Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said today the April 28 rally by Bersih 2.0 does not pose a security threat to the nation, adding that the civil rights movement's demands had gained little traction with the public.

"April 28 is not an issue," the home minister told reporters.

He appeared to suggest that the federal government has accommodated the group's demands on electoral issues through a Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) set up last year, the repeal of the Internal Security Act (ISA) and even addressed public fears as to radioactive hazards on the Lynas rare earths project in Pahang.

"It's one big pot. The ultimate motive is political," he said.

"Don't blame the police if we take action if they [protesters/organisers] do more than they promised the public," he added.

Hishammuddin also described the organisers and participants of the Bersih rally as "irresponsible".

He said the recently passed Peaceful Assembly Act will be tested next Saturday.

Hishammuddin (picture) cautioned the public to be careful of allegations regarding an attack on university activists camped at Dataran Merdeka in the wee hours of this morning, saying the claims could be manipulated to rouse anger against the government.

"There have been cases where allegations of such nature have been used... to raise emotions, be it in areas of race, religion and now involving students," he said.

Bersih 2.0 is planning a sequel next Saturday to its mammoth rally on July 9 last year to raise greater attention to its causes ahead of the 13th general election, widely believed will be called soon ahead of its expiry next March.

Last year, thousands thronged the capital city's streets to march for free and fair elections during a time when gatherings were still deemed illegal without permit from the authorities.

At about midday, riot police fired tear gas and chemical-laced water to disperse protesters who had assembled for an otherwise peaceful event calling for electoral reform.

The clampdown drew negative publicity for the Najib administration in the foreign media, and was seen as the catalyst for a series of reforms announced by the government.

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