

Najib promises credible panellists will probe violence against media
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By Clara Chooi

PUTRAJAYA, May 3 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak pledged today that "credible, experienced and respectable" individuals will form the independent panel tasked to investigate allegations of police brutality against pressmen during last weekend's Bersih 3.0 protest.

The prime minister said the panel would likely be formed by next week, noting that the decision had already been agreed upon by Cabinet members.

"I support (the formation of the panel), that's why we brought it in Cabinet... that's a Cabinet decision.

"I've discussed with Hisham (Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein) and we are seeking suitable members. Perhaps by next week, we can announce (the panel).

"(We want) credible, experienced individuals, respected by society and yet (who) understand the workings of the police and so forth," he told a press conference here after meeting with GLC (government-linked companies) representatives.

Najib added that he, along with the entire government and members of the public, are keeping a close eye on investigations into the allegations that journalists, both local and foreign, had been roughed up during the rally for free and fair elections.

Hishammuddin had announced earlier today that an independent panel would be set up to investigate the claims.

Some over six local pressmen and about 12 photographers and journalists from the foreign media were reportedly assaulted during the fracas on Saturday, after the police sprayed water cannons and tear gas to disperse Bersih 3.0 protesters.

Both local and foreign media groups have condemned the hard-handed tactics used on the media, whom they pointed out were merely doing their jobs.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) had yesterday called on Putrajaya to form an independent panel to investigate the violent attacks, suggesting that it should comprise a retired judge, a former Bar Council President as well as journalism experts.

City police had earlier today displayed 49 mugshots of those suspected of crimes during Saturday's chaotic Bersih rally but said no policemen have yet been identified yet despite the loud and growing accusations of police brutality.

Chaos reigned on the streets of Kuala Lumpur for over four hours after 3pm last Saturday when police fired tear gas and water cannons and chased protesters down the streets of the capital to disperse what had initially started out as a peaceful protest calling for free and fair elections.

Kuala Lumpur police chief Datuk Mohamad Salleh told the press conference today the 49 were being investigated for various crimes under the Penal Code related to unlawful assemblies and disobeying police orders.

When asked if any policemen have been listed as suspects he said there were no numbers yet but said it was not an issue as there are "no problems tracing" members of the force.

"Where is the proof? Show us. These are only allegations which must have proof," he said when asked repeatedly about various allegations of police brutality.

The Bar Council has said that its observers found that police brutality at last week's rally was "magnified" as compared to already chaotic scenes in a similar gathering for free and fair elections last July 9.

Police fired tear gas and water cannon after some demonstrators breached the barricade in front of DBKL and rushed into Dataran Merdeka, which the court had barred the public from entering across the weekend.

Police fired as far as the DBKL premises, which are across Jalan Parlimen, and the move broke up the crowd who fled helter-skelter but police chased them down at Jalan Tun Perak and Jalan Raja Laut.

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