

Najib: Violence caused by Bersih's rejection of stadium offer
The Malaysian Insider
May 03, 2012
By Clara Chooi

PUTRAJAYA, May 3 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak appeared today to blame Bersih 3.0 organisers for last Saturday's violence, saying if the group had accepted the government's Stadium Merdeka offer, "these things would not have happened at all".

The prime minister said the gathering for free and fair elections would have been peaceful if it had been held at the stadium as the authorities would have facilitated the event.

"The root of the problem, the real root cause of all these (incidents), if you like, was when they rejected the offer to have it at Stadium Merdeka," he told a press conference after meeting with GLC (government-linked companies) representatives here today.

"If only the organisers had listened to us. These things would not have happened at all, nobody would have been injured," he added.

Najib pointed out that such violence and injuries were common in most street protests, whether in Malaysia or abroad, and this, he stressed, was the key reason why the government had wanted to avoid such clashes.

He cited protests in modern societies like the United States and United Kingdom as examples, adding it was difficult to avoid altercations among protesters.

This, he explained, was also the main reason why his administration had enacted the Peaceful Assembly Act 2011, which was mooted last year to better regulate public gatherings after the fracas of Bersih's last rally in July last year.

"Okay... there might be some allegations... but that's why we wanted to avoid street demonstrations.

"You see, if they had chosen Stadium Merdeka, which was their request before (last year), it would have been a very peaceful gathering - we would have facilitated them, nothing of this sort would have happened.

"We've always said, we've always maintained that if you have street demonstrations, you cannot control street demonstrations and this is what happened," he said. The Peaceful Assembly Act 2011 prohibits street protests but allows public gatherings in designated areas of assembly, which the government has yet to determine.

But attempts by election watchdog Bersih to hold its third protest for free and fair polls at Dataran Merdeka, the iconic square where Malaysia's independence was first declared, was rejected by the authorities.

Instead, the government offered Stadium Merdeka to the protesters, the venue that Bersih had sought to use last year for its July 9 protest.

Despite the rejection, Bersih pressed on, directing participants last Saturday to gather at other locations before marching towards Dataran Merdeka, which had been cordoned off following a court order.

Following this, chaos broke the usual hustle and bustle on the streets of Kuala Lumpur for over four hours after 3pm 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.

Some 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 Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/najib-violence-caused-by-bersih-rejection-of-stadium-offer/>