

BERSIH's Agenda Derailed By Opposition
Bernama
May 4, 2012
By Zulkefli Salleh

KUALA LUMPUR, May 4 (Bernama) -- The civil society movement demanding electoral reforms through peaceful assembly by non-governmental organisations (NGO), which was actually in line with the government's political transformation, is said to have been derailed by its own associates from opposition parties.

More and more evidence in the form of videos, pictures, witnesses and opposition leaders' speeches uploaded on Youtube show the opposition hijacked last Saturday's Bersih 3.0 assembly in the capital and was said to have intentionally sparked off chaos and violence.

In a video recording, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) deputy president Azmin Ali apparently encouraged the demonstrators to remove the barbed wire and barriers at Dataran Merdeka and storm into the square, access to which was barred by a magistrate's court restraining order.

A few days before the violent demonstration, Kelantan Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Nik Aziz Nik Mat had reportedly issued a "fatwa" that it was halal (kosher) to overthrow a 'sinful' government through street demonstrations.

The peaceful assembly, on the pretext of reforming the democratic process, which turned violent, showed up another irony in that the democratic movement itself failed to educate the people to respect and practise the main principle of the system - to uphold the law.

There are more than 80 NGOs under BERSIH who use peaceful assemblies as a medium to demand better democratic practices and claim the Election Commission is not fair and that the government is cruel.

In the name of the right to gather and be heard, a section of the participants themselves did not exhibit the qualities of a democratic country's citizen by obeying the law, respecting the majority and acknowledging the rights of others.

They, not only disobeyed the court order restraining the assembly from being held at Dataran Merdeka, but also broke several laws.

The public have seen how the demonstrators blindly attacked the police and hurled objects at them when the police fired tear gas cannisters and turned on the water cannons after repeated warnings to disperse were ignored.

A demonstrator was recorded viciously kicking a traffic police personnel after he fell from his motorcycle. And, in another violent incident, demonstrators were seen assaulting a policeman who was driving a patrol car and vandalising the vehicle after it skidded onto the pavement outside a complex.

The question of whether the Bersih leaders were genuine towards their movement and about the objective of the assembly, or just aiding the opposition parties, can only be answered by them. The behaviour of the BERSIH participants did not reflect the attitude and maturity of a civil society.

Are those supporting BERSIH's struggle prepared to adopt the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression as practised by Western countries, where activists gather peacefully?

Is it not BERSIH's responsibility to educate the people who choose their method to fight for an improvement of the democratic process?

BERSIH should not just wash its hands off the violence which occurred that day.

So far, BERSIH has not issued any statement that the assembly was hijacked by politicians who took advantage of the event to provoke the people to show their anger and hatred towards the security forces and the government.

Former Bar Council president Ambiga Sreenivasan was reported as saying, BERSIH was of the opinion that those who had been violent and damaged public property on that day should be held accountable under the law.

Commenting on the participants' failure to obey her orders to disperse, she reportedly said the order was issued right after 2pm "after the assembly had achieved its objectives", but it was not heard by all the demonstrators as their number was great.

In other words, she admitted that it was difficult to control a demonstration of such proportion, but why was she quick to blame the police when the same demonstrators refused to obey police orders?

The angry demonstrators who were fired with tear gas and water cannons claimed that the police did not give due warning and time for them to disperse.

Observers tend to conclude that if BERSIH was considered successful, the movement has succeeded in influencing the people to disrespect the court, police and other authorities which represent the nation's legal system.

From the perspective of popular support, official estimates do not show a significant increase in public participation of the three assemblies, so far.

Although BERSIH claimed it drew more than 200,000 people to Saturday's assembly, aerial photographs do not reflect that number. The official estimate is only between 30,000 and 35,000, with about 50 per cent Malays, 45 per cent Chinese and the rest, Indians.

The Chinese community's enthusiasm in participating in Saturday's assembly, which saw significant numbers for the first time, may be dampened in the future due to the violence that day.

This was evidenced by a Chinese participant who blasted PKR leaders at a recent press conference, saying lives were endangered and accused the party of hijacking the assembly and perpetrating the violence.

---BERNAMA

Copyright © 2012 BERNAMA

Source: <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v6/bm/newsindex.php?id=663911>