

Bersih demonstrators face rioting charges
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, May 1 — Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said today that police are hot on the heels of aggressors responsible for Saturday's violence, adding that the culprits will be slapped with criminal or rioting charges.

Writing on his Twitter account today, the home minister, after bidding "hello" to his followers, confirmed that at least one individual had been detained over the Bersih 3.0 fracas.

"Hi e'one — having a relaxing weekend? I'm not — am wt PDRM identifying d culprits of 28th. I can confirm one has been detained this morning," he wrote, using his Twitter handle @HishammuddinH20.

Late last night, police arrested Rasah PKR deputy chief R. Thangam at his home in Seremban and have obtained a three-day remand order to investigate him under Section 440 of the Penal Code for causing mischief during a protest.

Hishammuddin added that he has also contacted the Attorney-General's Chambers, which confirmed that many charges could be used for offences committed during the rally.

"I have also called the Attorney-General's Chambers — many charges can be used, including under criminal Acts and those linked to rioting," he wrote.

"We are presently in post-Bersih 3 mode — those who are wrong remain wrong and will be dragged to court," he added.

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.

The melee was believed to have begun after overzealous protesters either mistakenly or deliberately breached the three rings of barricades — razor-wire fences, plastic blockades and metal gates — that were placed around Dataran Merdeka.

A peaceful start to the rally. — file pic

According to Bersih 3.0 and opposition party leaders, the barriers were breached after the rally was called to a close and declared a success but it is believed that the message was lost among the sheer thousands who turned up for the event, the third to be held since 2007.

The ensuing violence has pitted both Bersih supporters and the government in a blame game.

Scores of civilians, policemen and even journalists were hurt when the protest took an ugly twist with demonstrators refusing to back down and even raining missiles upon their armed pursuers.

The cat-and-mouse game went on for hours and many protesters were seen allegedly being beaten by the police but in his immediate response, Hishammuddin insisted that the police had acted with restraint.

International media organisations have already predicted that the force used by the police may have a negative backlash on the Najib administration, adding that polls may have to be delayed past its expected June date if the government is keen on recapturing lost votes.

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