

Poor organisational skills and a lack of leadership
The Malaysian Insider
May 02, 2012
By Hussaini Abdul Karim

KUALA LUMPUR, May 2 — What caught my attention first the moment I alighted the LRT train at Pasar Seni at about 1.45pm was the generally young, enthusiastic and innocent-looking (very large) crowd of people and all of them sported a happy look and with a lot of hope in their mind, the same thing I had in mine. Strangers could be seen chatting with and smiling at each other regardless of race, language or religion with fists raised just to show our positive spirit. We all came as one people, as Malaysians!

The movement, Bersih, led by former Bar Council President, Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan, going by the estimated more than 100,000 people who attended 'Perhimpunan Bersih 3.0' last Saturday, is obviously very popular but the organisers of the rally obviously lack organisational skills and leadership and they have wasted a great opportunity. As a result 'Perhimpunan Bersih 3.0' was easily 'hijacked' by opposition parties and anti-government people who had their own agenda to fulfil. The crowd, not knowing what was happening and what they were supposed to do, did their own thing. Many of us thinking that the rally was heading towards an anti-climax, headed to the nearest LRT station or bus terminal, to go home. I was walking towards Masjid Jamek LRT Station, like many others.

A cordoned off Jalan Lekiu near the Loke Yew Building.

Earlier, we had walked slowly towards Dataran Merdeka and I saw thousands of people mostly dressed in Bersih 3.0 T-shirts with some dressed in green. Along the way was a young man working tirelessly handing out free bottles of mineral water. Everyone shouted slogans such as, 'REFORMASI', 'BERSIH', 'WE WANT FAIR ELECTIONS' and so on.

Upon reaching Jalan Lekiu near the Loke Yew Building, I saw a police roadblock manned by at least 100 men. That was the closest the crowd, including me, got to Dataran Merdeka. I believe, all the other entrances were similarly blocked and no one could enter Dataran Merdeka.

Seeing that, I inferred, this time, the police and the authorities were well prepared and they had won hands down. Bersih 3.0 had no answer for the police preparedness and I was very disappointed with Bersih 3.0 organisers for not being prepared and I believe, they just took things for granted. First and foremost there was no communication between the organisers and the people which I thought is something that could be very simply organised. Just get Bersih 3.0 agents and station them at all the entrances to Dataran Merdeka equipped with walkie-talkies and inform them what to do next. They then can broadcast the information or announce it to the crowd in the respective areas. That way the crowd will know what to do rather than leaving all of them including me not knowing at all what's going to happen.

National laureate Pak Samad (centre) with fellow rally-goers.

I think the organiser or organisers of Bersih 3.0 are a bunch of amateurs. I am not just criticising Bersih 3.0 here without offering them some workable suggestions. In any event of such a size, the very first thing an experienced and professional organiser or organisers will think of is 'communication' between them and the people. Communication can also be a

means to warn people of impending police brutality and to advise or instruct people on the right things to do and to avoid any confrontation with the police. The fact that the Bersih 3.0 organiser or organisers did not have that infers that they are all ill experienced and amateurs.

What I did not understand was, being well-prepared and in control, the police resorted to doing some things that I consider cruel. One was throwing several canisters of tear gas at an enclosed area like the Masjid Jamek LRT Station when the station was full of people who just wanted to catch the next train home and two, beating up some people who sought refuge within the compound of Masjid India, dragging and beating them and these are people who did not even resist arrest or were seen to be troublemakers!

I was an army officer before and I was trained on the handling of tear gas and we were told never to throw tear gas at enclosed areas. Tear gas is meant to be used to disperse crowds at open areas. In an enclosed area like the Masjid Jamek LRT Station, how would one expect the crowd to disperse?

Because of the tear gas, I was hurt and I had to be treated. Luckily, there were many Good Samaritans who were at the station who helped me and after recovering, while being very thankful to those good people, I left home feeling very disappointed, angry and frustrated.

PS There were actually many tear gas canisters thrown at Masjid Jamek by the police and I was one of the people in the crowd who was badly hurt.

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