

Police conduct in Bersih rally "unacceptable", says Suhakam
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 3 — The use of what was described as disproportionate and unwarranted force by the police during last Saturday's Bersih rally for free and fair elections is unacceptable, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) said today.

"Suhakam is deeply disappointed and concerned over...allegations of the heavy handed and arbitrary manner by which the police dispersed members of the public," its chairman Tan Sri Hasmy Agam said in a statement today.

"The Commission is also appalled by the alleged treatment of the police of members of the media...some were allegedly assaulted while two reporters were reportedly arrested, besides having their equipment damaged or confiscated by the police," Hasmy (picture) added.

He pointed out that Suhakam had repeatedly called upon the authorities to employ "proportionate and nonviolent methods" when controlling or dispersing a crowd during an assembly.

He added that Suhakam had urged the police to facilitate the people's exercise of the right to assemble, pointing out the "peaceful" rallies in Georgetown, Kuantan, Johor Bharu, Ipoh, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu were proof of its feasibility.

He stressed that the public should be allowed to assemble as such gatherings provided them an avenue to express themselves on issues of concern.

"These rights (to assemble peacefully) are provided for under Article 10(1)(b) of the Federal Constitution and Article 20(1) of the Universal of Human Rights (UDHR) as well as the Peaceful Assembly Act 2011, and Article 19 of the UDHR on freedom of expression," he said.

He also called upon the public to come forward with proof or information regarding human rights violation during the rally to help Suhakam in its investigations.

The Bersih rally for free and fair elections turned chaotic when Federal Reserve Unit (FRU) personnel began firing tear gas and water cannons after demonstrators breached police lines in their attempt to reach Dataran Merdeka.

The event was initially planned for the historic square but authorities had secured a court order on Friday barring its use for public assemblies until May 1, forcing Bersih supporters to splinter into groups.

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