

Bersih denies plans to overthrow BN government
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 5 — Bersih denied today that it had amassed thousands to the streets of the capital last Saturday to overthrow the government, rejecting the hardline position taken by the Najib administration against its push for greater electoral reform.

The election watchdog, which has in the past repeatedly denied being pro-opposition, insisted that Bersih 3.0's objectives were purely to demand a clean and fair polls process.

"Bersih wants free and fair elections.

"It is our wish that any changes to those who will ultimately represent us in government be made through the ballot box in elections that are clean and fair," the 84-member coalition said in a statement here.

File photo of policemen trying to detain a rally participant on April 28. Bersih said the police used undue force on participants. — Picture by Jack Ooi

According to The Star Online yesterday, Najib had claimed that last weekend's Bersih 3.0 rally was an attempt to topple the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) government.

The prime minister reportedly told a rally in Kelantan that was telecast live on television that the April 28 demonstrators had wanted more than to rally in Dataran Merdeka for a few hours.

"They wanted to occupy the square for days. That was why Bersih 3.0 organisers had rejected government's offer for the event to be held at other venues including Stadium Merdeka.

"Their intention was purely political. It was an attempt to take over Putrajaya.

"They had wanted to overthrow the government that was elected by the people," he was reported as saying by The Star Online at the 1 Malaysia community carnival launch in Gua Musang.

But the election watchdog group asked Najib today how its plan to gather at the iconic independence square had posed any threat to the government's position of power.

"The government has not explained how occupying Dataran Merdeka constitutes a threat to government, or an attempt to overthrow the government," it pointed out.

The group also maintained that it had not erred in its decision to reject the government's offer to hold the protest at Stadium Merdeka, refuting another claim by Najib that this had been the cause of the violence that marred the otherwise peaceful gathering.

It pointed to the size of the gathering and the last-minute notice given to protesters to change their venue plans, insisting that accepting the offer would have resulted in chaos.

“On hindsight, we believe it was also a good thing not to have accepted Stadium Merdeka.

“Given the conduct and ill intent of some of the police force, the stadium would have been a trap that would have been wholly unsafe for the participants,” it alleged.

Najib had on Thursday appeared 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”.

He 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.

But Bersih insisted that based on medical reports of those detained during the event, the violent clashes between protesters and police personnel were likely instigated by the latter group.

“Medical reports of some of those who were detained by the police appear to show that some members of the police force were out to punish those who wore Bersih 3.0 T-shirts, anti-Lynas T-shirts or any yellow T-shirts, by inflicting excessive and completely unjustified violence on them,” the group said.

It alleged that some detainees were also attacked as they were getting arrested, even when they were dining in shops, about to board the LRT, while some were attacked after arrest, despite the absence of struggle.

Even media personnel were not spared the alleged acts of police brutality, Bersih pointed out, with more than 12 photographers and journalists having been assaulted, intimidated or detained by police while reporting the rally, and cameras, memory cards and video equipment taken away.

“The brutality suggests that a segment of the police force on duty that day had acted with vengeance against Bersih 3.0 participants whether due to orders given to them or because they had lost control.

“There are too many reports of police officers who were wearing blue police uniforms but without their names and police identity numbers so as to prevent the victims of violence from identifying the perpetrators of police violence,” the group said.

“The unanswered question still remains — who is responsible for the untold violence upon participants of the Duduk Bantah that occurred after the first tear gas was fired?”

Bersih demanded that the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) be tasked to conduct an independent public inquiry into the alleged acts of police brutality, noting that the panel proposed by the Cabinet was merely to probe violence against the media.

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/bersih-denies-plans-to-overthrow-bn-government/>