

Umno using assembly 'fatwa' for political survival, PKR says
The Malaysian Insider
May 07 , 2012
By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, May 7 — PKR today criticised the National Fatwa Council's latest edict banning Muslims from participating in unlawful and anti-government assemblies, claiming it was an Umno ploy to stifle dissent.

PKR information chief Dr Muhammad Nur Manuty said the council's "fatwa" was in direct contradiction with another issued by Islamic scholar Shaikh Yusuf al-Qardawi.

Qardawi, who is president of the World Ulama Council, had said demonstrations were necessary to free a nation's people from tyrannical rule, according to Muhammad Nur.

"It is clear the fatwa has been issued just to fulfil the Umno leadership's desperate desire to use Islam and Malays for their political survival.

"The Fatwa Council should have referred to Pakatan Rakyat leaders to get a clearer picture of what had actually happened during the April 28 rally," he said in a statement.

"Keadilan is confident that the Bersih 3.0 organisers had a clear motive, that is: to gather peacefully to ensure that there is justice and transparency in the country's electoral process," the PKR leader added.

Muhammad Nur questioned the Fatwa Council's credibility in issuing the edict, and asked why similar bans were not issued against the use of sex videos and slander to defame individuals.

"What about the physical violence perpetrated by the police towards Bersih protesters? The people deserve an honest answer from the council," he said.

According to Bernama Online yesterday, the council had declared it "haram" for Muslims to participate in "unproductive" and unlawful assemblies that would lead to chaos, in an edict issued over a week after the Bersih 3.0 rally on April 28.

"Rioting, causing disturbances and damaging public property are all forbidden by Islam. This also applies to any intention to topple a duly elected government by organising such demonstrations," council chairman Tan Sri Dr Abdul Shukor Husin was quoted as saying by the national news agency.

"No one is exempted, and cannot support any efforts that can cause harm, anxiety or unrest among Muslims to the point of the community becoming split, what more if there is bloodshed," Abdul Shukor said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak on Friday asserted that the rally for free and fair elections was an attempt to oust the country's duly-elected government, a claim that has been echoed by former premier Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The election watchdog yesterday denied the claim, and insisted that Bersih 3.0's objectives were purely to demand a clean and fair polls process.

Bersih 3.0 was initially planned for the historic Dataran Merdeka but authorities had secured a court order on April 27 barring its use for public assemblies until May 1, forcing Bersih supporters to splinter into groups.

Despite an initially peaceful start to the rally, Bersih's third since 2007, police would later take measures that are now being condemned as more brutal than those employed during last year's tumultuous July 11 Bersih 2.0 rally.

The Malaysian Insider

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