

Bersih: Putrajaya urging foreign governments to crack down on Bersih protesters
The Malaysian Insider
May 08 , 2012
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, May 8 — Bersih alleged today that the Najib administration has requested that the governments of other countries crack down on Malaysians who participated in Bersih 3.0 rallies overseas.

In a statement here, the election watchdog said such action should be “deplored” and urged Malaysians across the globe to support the safety of their fellow citizens living outside the country.

“We express concern that the Malaysian government appears to be requesting governments not disposed to democratic reforms to launch a crackdown on Malaysians living in their countries who participated in the global Bersih 3.0 event on April 2012.

“If these reports are true, it is a negative development that must be deplored, and we urge all Malaysians to unite in support of the safety of our fellow citizens,” the group said in the statement.

Bersih 3.0 was said to have been attended by tens of thousands of Malaysians not merely within the country but across the globe, where similar rallies for free and fair elections were held in 85 cities across 35 countries.

Within Malaysia, Bersih 3.0’s main event in Kuala Lumpur was held simultaneously in 11 other cities in both the peninsula and east Malaysia.

But the protest on the streets of the capital, held on April 28, turned violent after 3pm when participants breached the barriers of Dataran Merdeka, which had been cordoned off following a court order.

In the ensuing melee, scores were injured as police clashed with protesters amid a bombardment of tear gas and chemical-laced water, resulting in the ongoing blame-game between organisers and the authorities over who was responsible for the violence.

To date, police have only put out feelers for allegedly unruly protesters and have yet to indicate if any of its personnel would be investigated for attacking the rally participants.

Bersih today also urged the government to accept an offer made by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression Frank LaRue to investigate the events surrounding Bersih 3.0.

LaRue, a lawyer by profession, had made the offer following numerous allegations of police brutality against protesters who had gathered on April 28 for what was meant to be a peaceful demonstration.

But according to procedure, LaRue can only do so on invitation by the Malaysian government.

“Such an investigation ought to examine the role of Bersih 2.0 as the organiser and the responsibility of the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) and the Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) in facilitating such an assembly.

"We are ready to give every cooperation in such an investigation," Bersih said today.

The group continues to allege that excessive force was used to disperse protesters on April 28, pointing out that even members of the media were not spared in the melee.

It acknowledged that the government had agreed to form an independent panel to investigate the allegations of violence but expressed a deeper confidence in LaRue's ability to be more thorough in his probe.

"If indeed the government has nothing to hide and is keen for the truth to be established, in the interests of the rakyat, then this would be an ideal occasion and opportunity to do so," Bersih said.

The Malaysian Insider

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