

967 tear gas canisters, grenades fired at Bersih protestors
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KUALA LUMPUR, June 11 — A total of 909 tear gas canisters and 58 tear gas grenades were used to disperse the tens of thousands who gathered for the April 28 Bersih rally here which has resulted in repeated allegations of police brutality.

The Home Ministry also said in its reply to a parliamentary question by Batu Gajah MP Fong Po Kuan that the government spent RM1.8 million to police the rally for free and fair elections.

The number of tear gas shells fired was nearly four times the 262 used in the previous Bersih rally on July 9, 2011 which resulted in international condemnation for Putrajaya's clampdown on the electoral reform movement.

But the ministry insisted in a reply to a separate question by the DAP lawmaker that "police acted according to standard operating procedures (SOP) to prevent the situation from becoming more violent and threatening public safety."

"Police had to act swiftly to ensure the situation was under control," it said, despite violent clashes between police and protestors lasting for over four hours.

The government has set up a panel to investigate the April 28 violence, but the choice of former national police chief Tun Hanif Omar has been widely criticised after he compared the movement to communism and accused the organisers of an attempted coup.

The rally that saw tens of thousands gather at six different locations in the capital city before heading to the historic Dataran Merdeka was peaceful until about 2.30pm when Bersih chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan asked the crowd to disperse.

But her announcement was not heard by most of the crowd who persisted to linger around the historic square which the court had already barred to the public over the weekend.

Just before 3pm, some protestors breached the barricade surrounding the landmark, leading police to disperse the crowd with tear gas and water cannons.

Police then continued to pursue rally-goers down several streets amid chaotic scenes which saw violence from both sides over the next four hours.

Several dozen demonstrators have claimed that they were assaulted by groups of over 10 policemen at a time and visual evidence appears to back their claim but police also point to violence from rally-goers who attacked a police car.

The police car then crashed into a building before some protestors flipped it on its side.

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