

Cops given 'extra restraint' orders for Bersih 3.0, Hanif panel told
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By Clara Chooi

PUTRAJAYA, June 18 — The police were ordered to exercise “extra restraint” with protesters during Bersih 3.0, Putrajaya’s independent investigative panel was told today.

But according to panel chairman, former Inspector-General of Police Tun Hanif Omar, the police had also been ordered to disperse the crowd should they breach the barricades surrounding Dataran Merdeka, which had been blocked off to protesters via a court order.

Hanif told a press conference here that Kuala Lumpur police chief Datuk Mohamad Salleh, who had issued the orders, confirmed with the panel this morning that his instructions had reached the over 8,000 police personnel deployed for the April 28 event.

“He was quite certain that his orders had reached everyone because he had (earlier) addressed them (police personnel) in Pulapol,” Hanif said.

Hanif said the police followed standard operating procedures.

He said the order was given following the police’s standard operating procedures, adding that the authorities had also learned from experiences during Bersih 2.0 in July 9 last year.

“They (the police) got a bad image (after Bersih 2.0),” he pointed out.

Hanif explained that the “extra restraint” meant in the order was illustrated by how the police had allowed Bersih 3.0 protesters to march along the streets although assemblies in motion are prohibited under the new Peaceful Assembly Act 2011.

He said that the police had also made known to the public of their boundaries by erecting three layers of barricades in the 50m-radius surrounding Dataran Merdeka, which had been cordoned off as a restricted gathering point.

“So if you break through (the barricades), that means you absolutely want to break through,” he said.

Hanif also pointed out that the police had arranged for a line of their uniformed but unarmed personnel to stand behind the barricades. According to footage recorded prior to the breach at nearly 3pm, policemen were seen smiling at the crowds.

“That is restraint... hoping that people would respect the court order,” he said.

“But of course, they have to protect an order of the court,” he added, and agreed that the order to exercise “extra restraint” would no longer be in effect once Dataran Merdeka was breached.

“Yeah... you can’t let the court order be in vain,” he pointed out.

Hanif stressed, however, that the police would still have to stick to standard procedures even when dispersing the crowd, which meant that sufficient warning must be given to protesters before action is taken.

“Like the SOPs of the riot unit. You must give warning... three warnings. Disperse or I will disperse you with force — three times, 10 minutes between each warning,” he said.

But he added that “if the situation changes, then you do what needs to be done”.

When asked later if there were any orders allowing the police to push back protesters even past the 50m zone outside Dataran Merdeka, Hanif admitted that there is nothing in the police SOPs that allows this.

“But once an order to disperse is given, then of course you are not confined there anymore — you disperse,” he added.

The Hanif panel began its inquiry today by interviewing its first witness, theSun’s special and investigative reporting editor R. Nadeswaran, and two other journalists.

In the April 28 rally, violence and chaos reigned in the city’s streets shortly after 3pm when protesters broke past the barricades of Dataran Merdeka, triggering a four-hour cat-and-mouse game between the police and rally participants amid a rain of tear gas canisters and chemical-laced water.

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