

Hanif panel revisits April 28 Bersih rally sites
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KUALA LUMPUR, July 5 — An independent panel led by Tun Hanif Omar to probe allegations of impropriety during the Bersih rally is revisiting today several sites in the city where violent clashes between demonstrators and the authorities happened on April 28.

The Hanif panel's tour is also taking place on the same day the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) starts its official inquiry.

Its route will cover Jalan Raja, Jalan Parlimen and Dataran Merdeka, the historic square where the police had set up barbed wire blockades to prevent Bersih demonstrators from holding their peaceful sit-down protest against the government's delay in carrying out electoral reform earlier this year.

"By revisiting the assembly areas, the panel will get a clearer explanation of what happened.

"We will also be visiting the FRU depot at the Jalan Semarak Police Training Centre (Pulapol) and see how the FRU act," Hanif, a former Inspector-General of Police (IGP) told reporters, referring to the moniker for the police anti-riot squad under the Federal Reserve Unit.

"Was there a change in equipment on that day, did the police want to calm the situation or were they trying to provoke," he added.

The Home Ministry has told Parliament last month that 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 number of tear gas shells fired was nearly four times the 262 used in the previous Bersih rally on July 9, 2011 that drew international condemnation of Putrajaya's clampdown on the electoral reform movement.

Demonstrators who took part and several human rights observers have accused the police of provoking participants to violence and responding with extreme crowd control measures.

The ministry also said that the government spent RM1.8 million to police the rally for free and fair elections.

Today's visit involved explanations from the police and non-police personnel, including a reporter from The Sun newspaper, Pauline Wong, who was asked to testify before the panel.

Hanif said he had rejected an idea to hold a "mock-up" of the incident at the actual locations because the police had given a clear explanation during the visit earlier today.

"No need for a mock-up," the former policeman said.

"We came because we heard the explanation from the police, and non-police. When we visit, we get a clearer understanding," he added.

The tour involved the use of a bus, two vans and five cars from the Royal Malaysia Police.

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