

**A night with protesters at Padang Merbok**  
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**By Lee Shi-Ian**

Daybreak. And the mild Malaysian sun greets a picture never seen before at Padang Merbok.

Tents dot the green. Young people inside them, awake. They stretch, they smile, they crawl out to greet others who slept under the moon to enjoy the cool weather.

They all start thinking of breakfast.

About 300 or so students and youth have been here since yesterday's political rally, which drew tens of thousands who believe there was election fraud at General Election 2013 and want the election commission to resign. Those who spent the night here have declared they WILL camp it out until the 13th Parliament of Malaysia sits tomorrow to make their point. They want change.

The activists include members of Solidariti Anak Muda Malaysia (SAMM) but many others are young people who want to make their point that they have the resolve to see things through. Many have struck friendships here with those who were strangers just a day before.

The Malaysian Insider spent the night with them and found a scene filled with laughter, song, even little children scampering around screaming and squealing as they enjoyed an unorthodox weekend.

Enterprising traders had set up stalls at the padang to keep the protesters company and make a few ringgit selling drinks, finger food and burgers. There were also Blackout 505 badges, T-shirts and more of such to mark the occasion.

The secretariat too had set up shop, so to speak, on a pickup truck equipped with loudspeakers. Regular calls were made to reps from each tent to pick up free food and drinks.

A group of youth gathered around a friend who had brought a guitar and their raucous singing mocking the Election Commission brought rounds of applause from others.

A police patrol car passed through the Padang Merbok car park occasionally to make sure that the situation was safe and secure but otherwise did not interfere.

Marshals walked around to ensure those with nifty fingers did not cause any losses to the activists or curious passers-by.

A surprise visit from ABU leader Haris Ibrahim, who dropped by Padang Merbok at 1.05am, was warmly greeted by campers who had their pictures taken with him individually and in groups.

Haris told The Malaysian Insider that it was good to see everyone in a lighthearted mood and clearly enjoying themselves.

It was that, all right.

It did not start off that way when the first tents went up yesterday afternoon. There were scuffles when City Hall officers attempted to make them take down the tents. Padang Merbok comes under the control of City Hall and its own officers have powers to enforce the rules.

It is also why police have not acted against the 300. Unless City Hall makes a report, the police do not have the jurisdiction to evict the protesters.

In any case, the protesters seem resolved to have it their way.

"Erecting a tent is not an offence. It is not a permanent structure," is the point of view of International Islamic University law student Mohd Kamil Abdul Munim, 23.

Observers from the Malaysian Bar Council who were there yesterday saw it differently but were supportive of the 300.

"I'd like to urge the authorities to be a bit more accommodating," said Andrew Khoo, the co-chair of the human rights committee of the Bar Council, who spoke to The Malaysian Insider yesterday at the rally.

He added: "There are by-laws but in this situation it would be better if they had a more generous approach to this in the name of democracy."

This whole scene this morning really began with the march by about 20,000 yesterday from different gathering points to this one location to hear speeches from opposition leaders, including Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Last night, some of the campers were crouched around their tablets watching online videos of the rally.

Others lazed in the tents scrolling on their smart phones and tablets. One group brought a pack of cards and chips and were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

For those who needed to use the toilet, a nearby surau was helpful. But once it had closed, the next open surau was about 1km away, near the National Monument. Some took that walk for a shower and a change of clothing. Clothing and the towels were hung on a rope which was tied to the rugby poles at the padang.

It was about 2am before many of the activists and campers called it a night. The generator and the lights that had been strung up were turned off. The moon kept watch till the sun shushed it away. - June 23, 2013.

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