

Malaysian Bar 'dismayed' by PM's defence of red shirts, urges nationwide condemnation instead

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Bar Council president Steven Thiru said it was possibly the absence of proper organisation of the rally that had led to the negative events. — Picture by Saw Siow Feng

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 21 — The Malaysian Bar expressed concern today that the September 16 “red shirts” rally in the city had been defended by the prime minister as not racist in nature, even when reports from the mass gathering showed racially-charged speeches and acts of violence by some protesters.

In a statement, Bar Council president Steven Thiru said instead of condoning the event, all parties should condemn and reject the apparent show of racism and violence that had manifested during the public assembly.

“Such conduct is antithetical to the spirit of Malaysia Day, and has no place in a country that cherishes its multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural legacy and history,” he said.

“The Malaysian Bar,” he added, “is dismayed that the Prime Minister has reportedly defended the rally against criticism that the rally was racist in nature.”

During an event held by rally organisers Pesaka last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak reportedly defended the protest as being peaceful and called it the result of alleged insults to the Malay community.

Steven said today, however, that the reported standoff between protesters and security forces at the entrance to Petaling Street during the rally had been “troubling”.

He noted that one group of participants had tried to break police barricades into the popular shopping haven known as Malaysia’s “Chinatown” and the physical altercation between the groups later forced the police to fire water cannons to disperse the rowdy crowd.

It is “regrettable”, Steven said, that the police had been compelled to resort to using such methods to quell the apparent disorder.

Steven also took issue with the reported intimidation of several media representatives during the mass rally, likely referring to the incident where one reporter from a news portal was labelled “Cina gila babi” (crazy Chinese pig) by an angry protester.

The Bar Council president said media representatives should not be harassed in such a manner and should be allowed to carry out their duties freely.

He said it was possibly the absence of proper organisation of the rally that had led to the negative events.

The event, although officially organised by silat group Pesaka, appeared to receive the support and backing of numerous other organisations championing Malay rights.

The objectives and purpose of the rally were unclear to the very end, with some leaders claiming it was to oppose to the demands raised during Bersih 4 last month, while others said it was to protect the Malays from Chinese domination.

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