

Security threat at 1MDB forum a dubious excuse, says veteran newsman

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By Elizabeth Zachariah

The excuse of a security threat to stop the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) forum on Friday with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is questionable, a veteran journalist said.

This was because Najib had made had made appearances at open areas with thousands of people in attendance without any issues, Datuk A. Kadir Jasin said.

"How could an event, that was organised many days ago, held in a closed premises that belongs to Umno, suddenly be concluded by the police to be unsafe or possibly violent?"

"Why after people had gathered and Tun Mahathir had arrived, suddenly this civil meeting organised by Umno people, had become unsafe?" the former group editor-in-chief of the New Straits Times told The Malaysian Insider.

Kadir said if police could guarantee Najib's safety at an event with thousands of people, they should be able to keep him safe and secure at the forum which was attended by about 1,000 people.

"If he could appear in front of thousands of people in Sarawak, Pahang, Perlis, in open areas, why can't he appear in a closed area with just a thousand people?"

"You cannot blame people for concluding that the police had been told to issue that warning to save Najib from embarrassment. In reality, it is not others who are causing Najib embarrassment, but Najib is doing it to himself.

"It was not a violent meeting. It was a very civil gathering. This is nothing more than a lame excuse to cover up for Najib's absence," Kadir said.

Najib was scheduled to attend the highly anticipated "Nothing To Hide" forum organised by non-governmental organisation SukaGuam on Friday but backed out on the advice of Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar who ordered the forum be cancelled on the grounds of "public order and national harmony".

The event was postponed and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad instead took to the stage before police stopped him from addressing more than 1,000 people at the venue, despite trying to negotiate with them.

Many criticised police for their actions and the IGP admitted that the directive to stop Dr Mahathir from speaking at the forum had also come from him.

But Kadir, who is known to be close to the former prime minister, said Dr Mahathir was not upset with the police for cutting short his speech.

In fact, Kadir said, Dr Mahathir told him that the police, despite switching off the microphone and turning off the video, were courteous throughout the incident.

"I don't think he was badly handled. I met him after the event and he didn't think either," Kadir said.

Kadir also said that Dr Mahathir could not complain that he was not allowed to speak at the forum since it was not meant for him.

"The event was organised for Najib and not him but the prime minister did not turn up. Protocol-wise, Dr Mahathir cannot complain that he was not allowed to speak," said the supporter of the retired statesman.

Observers have said that Najib's no-show at the forum where his supporter-turned-critic Dr Mahathir was present, will undermine his credibility and damage his reputation

They said that despite security concerns, the prime minister, who, only a day earlier had declared that he has "warrior spirit", should have proved his mettle by engaging his critics and answering questions on current issues, especially on matters surrounding debt-laden 1MDB. – June 7, 2015.

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