



The #KamiMahuAir staged the rally in front of Menara Kinabalu.

UMS students refuse to hand over memo

TBP 15.06.2024 P.01

Elton Gomes

KOTA KINABALU: The #KamiMahuAir group who staged a peaceful assembly to demand solution to water problem at University Malaysia Sabah (UMS) on Friday, refused to hand over their memorandum to Deputy Chief Minister III Datuk Shahlemey Yahya.

The rally, which was organised by Suara Mahasiswa, saw about 50 of its members walk for about 2.5 kilometres from UMS at 2pm towards Menara Kinabalu where the Chief Minister's office is located.

As they were relaying their messages in front of Menara Kinabalu, Shahlemey and State Assistant Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Fairuz Renddan arrived to meet them.

Upon seeing Shahlemey and Fairuz, one of the rally goers raised his voices demanding that they not to interfere with their program.

"We are voicing the people's voice for the people now. Can't both of you wait and listen to us?" said the rally goers.

The situation escalated when no compromise between both sides forced the police to intervene to control the

situation.

The rally goers also refused to hand over the memorandum to Shahlemey but insisted that they will only pass it personally to Chief Minister Datuk Seri Hajiji Noor.

For a brief moment, Shahlemey was seen to have lost his cool over the situation but managed to calm down.

When met by the media, Shahlemey, who is also State Public Works Minister, said that he came down to see the group on behalf of the Chief Minister.

"I am just a normal citizen. I am listening to them. But it seems that they have no respect.

"It seems like they are playing with their game just to get media coverage," he said.

"From the words being uttered, the water demands is only an excuse to hold a demonstration, it is more politically motivated," he said.

Shahlemey added that the government would continue to address the water issue but it will not be solved overnight.

He said the Sabah State Water Department under his ministry had also implemented a programme to increase the level of clean water supply especially for residents in the East Coast area of Sabah.

"In Tawau we are building a (water) dam, constructing a water treatment plant in Lahad Datu and restoring water supply in Sandakan.

"This water supply does not mean talking about today and tomorrow everything will be available, it needs a reasonable time to be implemented," he told reporters.

The rally organiser, Hamdin Nordin, 23, from Sandakan, however, defended that being labelled as "rude" is subjective.

"Peaceful assembly is when we do not bring any weapon. As for uttering bad words, it is subjective," he said, adding the rally participants would camp outside Menara Kinabalu until they hand over the memorandum to Hajiji.

Kota Kinabalu police chief ACP Kasim Muda then informed the group that Fairuz had conveyed the message that Hajiji would meet the rally organiser next week and urged the group to disperse, but they refused to comply.

The rally goers then sat on the ground and continued with their program.

When asked about the situation of the assembly, Kasim said the rally was under control as it only involved a small number of people that wished to

meet with Hajiji.

"For now, we just allowed them to sit there and voice out what they want. Of course they do not have the permission but we are handling them," he said.

When asked if the police would take any action as there was no police permit, he said police will investigate and determine under what action to take against the rally goers.

"We will open investigation papers and if the court refuses to take action against them, then as the district police chief, I can compound the organiser," he said, adding the police personnel stationed at the area outnumbered the rally group.

The assembly was also attended by non-governmental organizations and the community. It was also monitored by the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) and a group of lawyers.

The participants highlighted the serious problems faced by people in various parts of Sabah and not just the UMS campus.

Armed with placards, banners, a loudspeaker and a tom-tom drum, they sang and shouted "bangkit" (rise) and "shut-air" (water, water), among others, as they walked from the UMS campus to Menara Kinabalu.