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Police question reporters over photos of student suspects

MUAR, Fri. - Reporters from three Bahasa Malaysia dailies which had published photographs of schoolchildren detained for alleged dadah-related offences were summoned for questioning by police early this week.

The dailies, in the Feb 19 and 20 issues, had published photographs of 24 schoolchildren, including some in handcuffs, when they were led into the premises of the Muar police station.

The New Straits Times learnt today that the police recorded statements from the reporters as to why they had taken photographs of the students.

The reporters were also quizzed on who had informed them of the arrests, or had given them the authorisation to photograph the students within the police station premises which is gazetted as a security area.

Johor police chief Datuk Zulkipli Mat Noor was unavailable for comment today, but had said last Saturday that he would take note of criticism on exposing (errant) students in public.

It is believed that this also follows an allegation that the students were brought by the police and made to line up at the police station to allow members of the media to take the students' photographs.

The NST understands that the police action to record statements from the reporters was believed to have stemmed from recent Government criticism against their (police) move to have allowed public exposure of minors in the media.

The wide media coverage on student arrests, especially following the Feb 19 and 20 publications, invoked a nationwide outcry by parents, non-governmental organisations, the Bar Council and other professionals.

One of the photographs showed 24 students, including seven girls, being led away by police from a secondary school in Tanjung Agas for dadah and Ecstasy pill abuse.

Other photographs showed 13 schoolchildren aged 11 to 17 being handcuffed and led away by police, and this gave rise to a debate over police indiscretion in this matter.

The handcuffing of schoolchildren prompted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to describe the Johor police action as unnecessary, saying that the police should have used their discretion when dealing with juveniles.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, hoped that such action by the police, would not recur, as it would put the children under tremendous pressure.

"They (the police) should not have handcuffed the schoolchildren. It could be because there was no instruction on this.

"Action should be taken against these children (students involved in crime) but there is no need to handcuff them. The police should have used their discretion," he had said.

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