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Truth must prevail

THESE are trying times for the country. A sacked Deputy Prime Minister faces five charges of sodomy and five charges of corrupt practices. Given the former stature and following of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, it is only logical that some uneasiness should surface. Indeed the uneasiness coalesced in large gatherings of his supporters. They had the potential to threaten peace and stability. The police had to act to disperse these illegal gatherings to ensure that law and order prevail. As much as we dislike the use of Internal Security Act, we have to recognise the formidable task facing the police when for more than two weeks Anwar blatantly broke the law and incited the people.

Observers, both benign and malign, especially the latter, must understand the rationale for two discrete issues that centre on Anwar. One, he is being detained under the ISA for inciting violence. Ever since he was sacked from public and political high office, Anwar has been bear-baiting the police to arrest him through incendiary speeches to his followers. Two, he has been charged in open court on Tuesday and Wednesday for acts of sodomy and corrupt practices. There should be no confusion over the two separate issues, though malign observers because of their preconceptions would propagate otherwise.

Then there is the new issue of allegations of assault Anwar has raised. On Tuesday, he told the Sessions Court that he was punched on the head, forehead and neck in the Bukit Aman police lock-up after his arrest on Sept 20. That he was given the opportunity to ventilate these allegations in an open court manifests the overriding theme of fair play inherent in the country's judicial system. That he was allowed to lodge a police report also says much about the police system, that the police will record any allegation from anyone, even those accused of violating the laws of the country and under detention.

Anwar's allegations of being beaten, we have been assured, will be addressed by thorough investigation. That they have not been dismissed peremptorily is manifest evidence of the authorities' intent to seek and establish the truth. The police have given their assurance that the investigation would be in-depth and conducted justly. As Supt Ghazali Md Amin of the Public Relations Division said in a statement on Tuesday that investigations of such nature had been carried out in the past, and the guilty parties had been charged in court. Indeed, even the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, gave his assurance yesterday in a Press conference that police brutality would not be tolerated in Malaysia although such a tendency was common among police forces in the US and Europe. He promised a full and thorough inquiry into Anwar's allegations. To make the investigation easier and if indeed Anwar's injury was caused by the police, the person or persons responsible should own up.

This is the only way to stop the doubting Thomases from continuing to construe the allegations as clear indications of police brutality. That is the way of the foreign media for whom the Government and the police can do no right, any which way either acts. But Malaysians should suspend judgment on Anwar's allegations for the nonce. They should give the independent police team an opportunity to investigate the allegations with disinterested vigour. Truth, which cannot be compromised, must ultimately prevail no matter who is involved in causing hurt to a person who is in police custody. Malaysians should be assured that this hallowed principle

would be the guiding spirit of the investigations.
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