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### Impartial police vital

DESPITE the criticisms against the police recently, it must be appreciated that the Malaysian police force has on the whole an exemplary record in discharging its duties to maintain law and order. This has contributed greatly to the general peace and allowed the people to go about their daily life without fear. That we are able to do this most of the time and take for granted our generally secure environment is because of the long arm of the law personified by policemen on the beat round the clock. It is already a tough job in ordinary times and it becomes tougher when the policemen's lives are at stake if they have to deal with hardened criminals carrying firearms. Just think of what it is like if someone's husband or son is a policeman and he is away on patrol at odd hours. Unlike other jobs where he can be expected to come home safe and sound to his loved ones after a hard day's work, a policeman's family is never sure whether he will return safely from work.

The hazards of the policemen's work are many and injury and death in the line of duty are risks which the policemen - and their families - have learnt to accept. This is something that we should bear in mind when we are tempted to criticise the police force whenever there are allegations of police brutality against members of the public.

However, this is not to say that the police force is without its faults or that there are no occasional abuses committed in the performance of its work. As in any large force comprising men and women from across all sections of society, mistakes could be made when some of them are executing their duties and there could also be over-zealous personnel in the police force using excessive force in dealing with demonstrators and possibly innocent bystanders who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. But in demonstrations and illegal assemblies which could turn violent, it is sometimes unavoidable that the police will have to use a certain amount of force to deal with the participants, particularly if they are outnumbered.

Whatever the circumstances, what is vital is that the police force as a whole should be guided by the principle that they remain unbiased, impartial and maintain their professionalism in undertaking their work. This is especially important when we are living in a multi-racial, multi-religious and democratic country. As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said, a neutral police force would enhance the people's belief in the police and the police would in turn get the people's support. If there are allegations of police brutality, the police themselves have on occasions done their own internal inquiries. There are also avenues such as the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) for the public to bring up such allegations to be investigated.

Policemen are humans too and although they are trained to be rational in a confrontation with members of the public, some of them may lose their cool in a provocative and tense situation. This is unfortunate because if it happens, the reaction could be even more provocations and hostility from the opposing side and worsen an already ugly situation. This then becomes a vicious cycle.

Policemen too want to have a peaceful society in which there is minimum violence because they want to go back safely every day to their families. They are there to prevent violence. However, to preserve the good image of the police, errant policemen who are identified as being deliberately

brutal in carrying out their work should be weeded out.  
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