

Hindraf march: Why double standards?
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The mass arrest of Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) activists who were trying to hold a rally on Sunday has raised questions over police treatment of peaceful demonstrations.

Coalition of Malaysian Indian Associations secretary G Gunaraj said the arrest of 108 Hindraf activists smacked of double standards because pro-government activists were allowed to demonstrate unobstructed.

I recall the day when Rembau MP Khairy Jamaluddin (right) led some 8,000 people to protest Israel's attack on the mv Mavi Marimara in front of the United States Embassy last year.

"Instead of being detained for questioning, Khairy was given police escort. However, in Hindraf's case, they applied for a permit, but this was rejected on the eve of their peaceful march," he said.

Gunaraj said the activists were all behaving in a peaceful manner and the amount of force used against them was disproportionate.

Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (KLSCAH) human rights committee chairperson Liaw Kok Fah expressed shock that the police arrested Hindraf legal adviser P Uthayakumar at his home.

"How could the police do that? At Uthayakumar's home? I mean, the police should at least wait until he attended the march... pick him up there, with the rest of the crowd," said Liaw.

MIC leader: Police colour blind

Liaw said that such arbitrary arrests showed that the authorities did not respect individual rights and echoed Gunaraj's views about the double standards of the police force.

"Back in 2009, protesters with a cow's head hurt the feelings of the Hindu community. They were spitting and kicking it but no one was handcuffed or shoved into police trucks.

"Was that what (the authorities) call a peaceful demonstration, as compared to what Hindraf was trying to achieve yesterday?" he asked.

However, two MIC leaders contacted both believe that the police acted appropriately.

"Police had given their warning earlier for them not to carry on with the rally as Hindraf is illegal. Hindraf does not respect the police or the rules and regulations in Malaysia.

"The police force is blind, it does not see colour, race or religion," said MIC information chief V Mogan.

Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department T Murugiah said the police had acted appropriately and did not manhandle any protester.

Murugiah said the protest had tarnished Malaysia's image.

'Interlok should be withheld for now'

On Sunday, Hindraf had initially planned a rally from KLCC to the Dang Wangi police station to lodge a police report against the Form Five Malay literature textbook Interlok.

The group, along with other critics, has been arguing that Interlok portrays the Indian and Chinese communities in negative light and should thus be withdrawn.

Gunaraj said the authorities should rightfully withdraw the book completely, instead of continuing to discuss the matter.

"I do not see any point in the novel still being used in schools in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Negri Sembilan.

"What is their (BN government's) motive? What is their agenda? What are the benefits for these three states to continue using that novel?

"The government had better do something fast about this matter as it has been months. Even their own MIC partners are not agreeing with themselves on this issue," Gunaraj pointed out.

Mogan said the MIC has taken steps to "remedy the matter" and that the party's proposal would be forwarded to the prime minister and education minister.

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