

## **Police move in to stop Seksualiti Merdeka forum**

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Some 20 to 30 police personnel abruptly ended a forum last night in Kuala Lumpur, held in conjunction with the banned Seksualiti Merdeka festival.

Seksualiti Merdeka co-coordinator Pang Khee Teik said they arrived at the Annexe Gallery of the Pasar Seni (formerly Central Market) about 7.30pm.

pang khee teikDespite some 30 people having turned up for the event, Pang said the police action caused the forum to be aborted before it could even begin.

"Just as we were about to close the doors at 8pm, the police moved in and said this was a public place and asked us to disperse. We dispersed, and we have not gone back in today," he said.

"The police behaved orderly and did not seize any materials," he said.

The forum, titled "Nine to Five: Sexuality Rights in the Workplace" was meant to educate participants on how the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community manage their gender identity in the workplace.

Pang refused to comment further when asked about the status of the Seksualiti Merdeka programme from Nov 9 to 13, which is due to be held at the Annexe Gallery.

Yesterday, deputy inspector-general of police Khalid Abu Bakar announced a blanket ban on the Seksualiti Merdeka event.

The event has been held since 2008 to promote better understanding of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in the country and for the people to respect their rights.

Reacting soon after the ban announcement was made, Pang described it as "a tragic day for Malaysia".

While several quarters have voiced their opposition to Seksualiti Merdeka, some organisations such as the Bar Council, Suaram and Sisters in Islam have expressed regret over the ban imposed by the police.

The move last night was the second time police disrupted a Seksualiti Merdeka. Four police officers

gate-crashed a human rights workshop held on Monday night.

Police arrived at this event after getting a tip-off that there was a "gathering of gays and lesbians", but left after finding nothing wrong with it.

Yesterday's ban on Seksualiti Merdeka event has resulted in police adopting a more hardline approach with the aim of forcing the organisers to abort their programmes.

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