

Police brutality: A first person account
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Several press photographers have complained that police barred them from documenting the sometimes brutal arrests being made at the Bersih 3.0 rally in Kuala Lumpur last Saturday.

I am among them and at that time was taking photographs of police breaking up a group of protesters when I was arrested at the intersection of Jalan Raja Laut and Jalan Parlimen, near Dataran Merdeka.

Despite displaying my media accreditation tag on my photographer's vest and clearly identifying myself as a journalist, I was ordered by two police officers to "put the camera away".

I responded by lowering my camera and shouted out, "Media! Media!" and dug into my pockets for the lens cap when the police officers appeared dissatisfied.

NONE It was about 5.30pm then and the two policemen apprehended me and took away my camera and media tag.

I cooperated with the police and even helped them to remove my media tag from my vest, but in the process, my hat was knocked off my head and my voice recorder was dropped out of my pocket.

Another policeman retrieved the voice recorder, but with the battery and battery cover missing. My requests to recover my favourite hat were not entertained.

When being escorted past a line of police officers and men in uniform on Jalan Raja, one of the policeman sneaked a punch at my abdomen.

Although it is still stinging as I write this, the doctors gave me a clean bill of health after an expensive ultrasound scan.

Why am I detained? No answer

Despite no longer wearing my media tag, some of the police officers and men resting outside Saint Mary's Cathedral apparently recognised me as a member of the press and some were overheard saying "he's from the media," while some cheered as I walked past.

My questions on why I was being detained were ignored.

I was eventually held outside the Royal Selangor Club, with some 200 other detainees, until about 7pm, during which I helped to treat the injuries of some of the detainees.

NONE Several lawyers and a medical team were already there providing assistance, including legal advice, first aid and drinks.

Among the detainees were Batu MP Chua Tian Chang, who is better known as Tian Chua, Guang Ming Daily photographer Huang An Jian and a tourist from Sydney, Australia, who said he was arrested in front of the hostel he was staying.

As a former senior first-aider certified by the Australian Red Cross until my accreditation expired in 2009, I went around with my first-aid kit asking if anyone had been beaten. The typical responses were either, "Yes," or a sarcastic "Who hasn't?"

I cleaned and applied iodine solution on the wounds of at least five protesters who had suffered cuts and bruises on their arms and heads that evening. One protester had a deep cut on his left thumb and was told to see a doctor, out of concern that the dexterity of his finger would be affected if there was serious scarring.

I also saw a man lying down, barely conscious, for more than an hour, before he was taken away by an ambulance, weakly muttering "La ilaha illallah (there is no God except Allah)", when put on the stretcher.

I should consider myself lucky

It was then that I thought "I should consider myself lucky. I have seen worse that day. Much, much worse".

A motorcyclist stopped on the elevated Jalan Kuching above where we were held, to shoot the scene with his camcorder, prompting the police to jeer and shout at him to leave - and his good luck was that they were not able to reach him.

My harassment by the police had begun much earlier, about 3.30pm, when I was corralled together with several other reporters behind a line of riot police in action and harassed. I was also warned not to go near them.

NONE During my detention outside the Royal Selangor Club, I was able to negotiate the return of my press tag in exchange for my MyKad. Much later, a plainclothes police officer came to me and returned my camera - but without the memory card.

"I don't know what's inside, but my superiors have looked at the photos and they want them as evidence," he told me.

The memory card contains all the pictures I took from 3pm, shortly after the police crackdown began, and I was very annoyed about it. How could they confiscate my property, a vital part of my work for the day?

Among these were pictures of police pursuing and arresting a group of protesters, injuries suffered by a police officer, tear gas being fired and pictures of the blood-soaked TV Al-Hijrah videographer Mohd Azri Mohd Salleh Khalid posing with his media tag and saying that he was beaten by a group of protesters.

I was leaving Dataran Merdeka after failing to find a Kuala Lumpur City Council vehicle that was said to have been been torched by protesters when I came across the group of protesters as the police were about to charge at them.

NONE Later in the evening, as I was being taken away in a bus with the other detainees, I saw more instances of police brutality.

Detainees on the bus - despite having suffered at the hands of the police - gasped in horror as the bus passed scenes of protesters being beaten, including one lying on the ground and being kicked by several officers.

I was taken to the Police Training Centre (Pulapol) in Titiwangsa, Kuala Lumpur, where police officers processing the detainees were puzzled by my presence.

I was then taken to a deputy superintendent, who said my arrest was a mistake, and ordered the men to return my MyKad and to release me immediately.

There was no documentation done on my arrest, nor the confiscation of my camera memory card.

It took me 15 minutes to get out of Pulapol, being lost in the training centre. I asked for directions to the exit from everyone I came across and once outside, about 8.05pm, I took a taxi home. What a relief to

reach home!

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