

## **Beware of that thin blue line**

**MalaysiaKini.com**

**June 4, 2013**

**By S Thayaparan**

"Police are inevitably corrupted. ... Police always observe that criminals prosper. It takes a pretty dull policeman to miss the fact that the position of authority is the most prosperous criminal position available."

- Frank Herbert (God Emperor of Dune)

COMMENT "So, to blame the entire police force as a form of protest is not fair," said Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi. I do not blame the entire police force for the decrepit state it finds itself in; I blame the government of the day for that.

However since the home minister brought up the subject of "protest", instead of the Black 505 demonstrations perhaps it would be more constructive if Pakatan Rakyat and its supporters (of which I am one) held a massive street demonstration on this long overdue issue instead of picking on Hindraf chief P Waythamoorthy. As far as I can tell, Waythamoorthy is holding up his end of the agreement as far as voicing the concerns of the demographic he claims to represent.

Of course, Hindraf "had to concede issues relating to racism and deaths in custody during negotiations with the ruling coalition to get the concessions and promises of better economic opportunities for Indians" does make any kind of righteous indignation, untenable.

When you think of how many Malaysians over the decades have perished from "sudden death" which seems to be the nomenclature of whatever standard operating procedure that works to the detriment of the rakyat that has gone unanswered for decades, the time seems ripe for an outward expression of discontent.

A massive demonstration would remind the authorities that we the people, or at least a symbolic majority of us, object and abhor the violence perpetrated against us by the security forces which are supposed to safeguard our interest.

Opening the Pandora's Box

However, while I see clear lines when it comes to deaths in custody, many others may not. In a piece about the fallout of the murder of A Kugan, I wrote:

"Our outrage in some cases is also dependent on the guilt of the parties involved. We are indifferent to the fates of convicted inmates and the unsanitary (and most often criminally negligent) conditions they are housed in when it is the responsibility of the state to administer their welfare."

As usual, it is the disenfranchised and marginalised that have it worse, and while they may make up the criminal class of this country, always remember that those higher up on the criminal class structure will never suffer the fate of those without means.

Therefore, while I am contemptuous of the home minister's apparent concern for the "humanitarian" aspect of this issue, I would welcome any party seeking to express their dissatisfaction of the current state of affairs in a peaceful manner by holding demonstrations.

NONEIrene Fernandez (left), who has spent decades and at great personal cost exposing the underbelly of our criminal justice system asks, "Why is there so much resistance from the home minister and prime minister to investigate these cases independently, and to hold those responsible for these deaths accountable? Are they afraid that an independent and transparent police commission will open up a Pandora's Box?"

Yes, that Pandora's Box of race, class and massive corruption if the duelling IGPs are to be believed is something that the establishment wants to keep a lid on. Does not Zahid see the contradiction when he says that those who go beyond the scope of the standard operating procedure (SOP) should be held accountable and in the same breath says that the standard operating procedure needs to be reviewed?

No wonder the establishment see fits to ban certain media organisations from their meetings. Moreover, really, who can take anything seriously from a high-ranking minister who advocates emigration for those dissatisfied with how things are done in this country?

Malay-on-Malay violence

Do not make this a racial issue, say pro-establishment partisans.

However as I wrote in the Kugan piece, "The Kugan case like most flashpoints when it comes to the PDRM (Royal Malaysian Police) or any of the enforcement branches of the state reveals simmering race and class tensions that are so often glossed over in this country."

azlan Bearing in mind that I dispute the official statistics when it comes to non-Malay deaths in custody, especially when it concerns the Indian population, what of the Malay deaths in custody? My pro-establishment friends are quick to remind me that non-Malay deaths are always played up in the pro-opposition alternative (sic) media. Who cares about the Malays, they ask?

Certainly not Utusan Malaysia, I say. That bastion of Malay rights defenders, which sees fit to demonise every other community in this country but remains strangely silent on Malay-on-Malay violence when it comes to deaths in custody.

I assume it's Malay-on-Malay violence because we are constantly told that these institutions are 'Malay' institutions and because more often than not, the culprits behind non-Malay deaths in custody, specifically Indian deaths, are Indian police personnel. I am assuming the same applies to Malay deaths in custody.

My views on race relations in this country are politically incorrect so of course whenever these deaths in custody are brought to light, interested parties would seek maximum political mileage. However the question remains, why do the propaganda organs of the establishment remain silent when it comes to this issue and always drawn attention to the fact that the opposition by highlighting this issue is stirring "racial sentiment"?

State of disrepute

For decades, the establishment promulgated the canard that street demonstrations jeopardised public order and that the police were demonised for merely carrying out their job. Recent events have dispelled this canard. In other words, it was never about us, the public but all about how the police chose to respond to us.

azlan The same applies to this issue of deaths in custody. There is something wrong with the "standard operating procedure" of our police force. The problem may have been our apathy but at the end of the day, it is the response of the government of the day, which determines the functionality of our security apparatus.

Do not go around blaming the opposition. To any right-thinking Malaysian, it is not what the opposition says or does which has brought the police force into contempt and odium. It is what the government of the day says or does not say, or does or does not do, that has brought the PDRM into a state of disrepute.

Fernandez ended her piece with "It is also indeed equally important for the government to ratify and implement without delay the UN Convention Against Torture to reflect its political will to ensure citizens are free from torture by state

and non-state actors."

I would add the treaty to that convention, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Opcat) of which Article 1 states:

"The objective of the present protocol is to establish a system of regular visits undertaken by independent international and national bodies to places where people are deprived of their liberty, in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

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