

M'sia Day dialogue runs into hitch over venue

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By Susan Loone

A Malaysia Day discussion between PAS' Parit Buntar MP Mujahid Yusof Rawa and the Christian community in Butterworth was momentarily disrupted when the participants were told to leave their alternate venue.

NONEThe participants had switched their meeting to a restaurant at the last minute, after initially planning to hold it in the hall of St Mark's Church.

The change in venue had been prompted by a police report lodged on Sunday, objecting to the meeting.

At the restaurant, however, the owner approached the organisers, angrily saying she had not been told about the event and that the pastor had "cheated me".

"I was only told that food would be ordered. I was not told about a discussion. You said you want halal food and I said OK," she told Rev John Kennady of St Marks Church.

Saying "sorry", she told the group of about 40, including journalists and plainclothes special branch officers, to leave the restaurant.

Although the pastor said he had informed her about the discussion, she insisted that those present should leave, all the while apologising profusely.

Outside the restaurant, many police personnel stood watching and a police truck was stationed nearby.

NONEThe group was then told to return to the church hall. At the church compound, though, police officers led by one M Balan approached Mujahid (right) and the pastor.

"We are just going to have a discussion in conjunction with Malaysia Day. We will carry on with our dialogue," said Mujahid told Balan in negotiating for the event to proceed.

"Please protect our place and give me respect as a parliamentarian. Take care of (the participants) and tell them (Malay NGO protestors outside the church compound), instead of us."

By then, the number of participants had increased to 60, and they entered the hall for the discussion.

Members of the Malay group then joined the dialogue, which ended peacefully.

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