

M'sians march in London against Sedition Act
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In a tiny corner of London, a band of protesters livened up a somewhat gloomy Saturday with chants, cheers and urgings for the Sedition Act's immediate abolishment.

Nearly a hundred Malaysians converged on the Malaysian High Commission that weekend, in solidarity with the Bar Council's own walk two days earlier.

Mostly students, they were armed with signs, banners and opinions. People came from all over the United Kingdom; including students from Leeds, Cardiff, Reading, Bristol, Nottingham, Warwick, York and Southampton, among other places.

The Cardiff contingent got up before the chilly British sunrise to catch a 4.30am bus to London. Students from Nottingham caught a cheap 5am train. An enthusiastic group from Leeds endured a five-hour bus ride.

Yet for a crowd that didn't get much sleep, the chants were spirited and the speeches were loud. Cheers of 'Mansuh, mansuh, Akta Hasutan' ('Abolish, abolish the Sedition Act') turned heads on the streets.

"The past few weeks have been emotionally draining," one student lamented, recounting the roadblocks faced by the various students in lobbying individuals and Malaysian societies in the UK for support.

"How is this political?" she demanded, before going on to commend the students who had turned up.

It was clear later just how much risk - both public and personal - these Malaysians were taking just by showing up.

Cardiff group coordinator Jason Yong decided to survey the crowd. "How many are afraid of their parents, and whose parents would be angry if they knew you were here?" Some hands shot up, much to the crowd's amusement.

"Whose parents don't know they are here?" More hands went up.

Safwa (right), a law student from Hertfordshire, lauded the students for their independence: "We know you are risking a lot by coming today, we know that some of you are risking your scholarships."

"But let me tell you this, there are others who are risking a lot more than you are right now", she added, citing Adam Adli and Safwan Anang.

She also hit back against Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, who had earlier panned the Bar Council's walk.

"So what if [Khairy] said this whole campaign has not made an impact whatsoever? I'll tell him this, just check the Penal Code - we don't need the Sedition Act," she said.

From five to a hundred

Law students were not the only ones who turned up to support the campaign.

Daniel, a medical student, made the trip all the way from Manchester just to have his say on the matter. He also volunteered to coordinate the Manchester contingent.

An economics student, Robin (not her real name) was aware of the walk early on. "I've always been interested in student empowerment", she explained, adding that her friends had helped introduce her to activism some time ago.

Global Bersih activist Yolanda Augustin (left) was more reflective, expressing how encouraging it was to see the Malaysian activist movement grow in the UK over the years.

"I remember how much earlier on a protest would only get five people," she said.

In a surprise move, opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim also made a stealth appearance at the event, showing up briefly to encourage the crowd to "make their presence" known.

"There is no conceding without a proper protest," he announced.

The hundred-strong group of students proved to the rest of their peers in the UK that there was nothing to fear - the police kept the peace, the protesters made their point and every person made it home safely. If only that were a guarantee back home as well.