

Cops bar anti-ISA speeches in Penang Speaker's Square
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Speaker's Square is for the public to raise any subject under the sun... except issues against the country's laws, said Penang police.

penang isa vigil 010810 ocpd pcPolice acted to disrupt the anti-ISA vigil tonight as the force has received information that there would be trouble from a particular group, believed to be linked to Umno.

When asked if the police knew about a group of pro-ISA members believed to be Umno representatives gathering at the Square, Georgetown OCPD Asst Comm Gan Kong Meng conceded, saying 'Yes, they tried to create trouble and agitate'.

Speaking to reporters after the arrest of four NGO activists, Gan said that the police had received information about the NGOs gathering the previous day and had set out a plan to break up the rally as it was 'illegal'.

penang isa vigil 010810 order to disperse in front of police station "When we received the information, we made a plan because this gathering is illegal, under the Police Act and Penal Code Section 143," Gan told reporters at the Speaker's Square.

"Before 9pm, about 25 NGO representatives gathered and started to speak against the ISA, so we gave warning for them to disperse," he added.

"However, they did not disperse, so we gave them five minutes, (but) they still protested and we then managed to arrest three of them," he further added.

Their statements will be taken for further investigation, he said.

Gan was rather upset and raised his voice when asked why the police were arresting members of the public at the Speaker's Square, when it was a place to express their views freely.

penang isa vigil 010810 vigil outside police station "The session at the Speaker's Square has ended. This is my version, you do the coverage, don't instigate," he reported although the Square is allowed to be open for public speaking until 10pm on Wednesdays and Sundays.

Gan said issues about laws should be raised in the Parliament by parliamentarians, not at the Square.

"It is not that we do not allow people to express themselves, but here at the Speaker's Square we do not allow issues against any laws in the country," he added.

As at 10pm, a large group of policemen were still lingering at the Square, while NGO representatives and the public gathered in several groups, waiting for more action.

A group of 30 people, meanwhile, gathered outside the Jelutong police station, where those arrested were brought to, and have begun a candlelight vigil.

Earlier today, the police posted notices - signed by Georgetown OCPD Asst Comm Gan Kong Meng - around the Speaker's Square in Georgetown warning against any illegal gathering in

the area.

Penang CM: A sad day

Even before the vigil began at 9pm, two activists - Choo Choon Kai and Kris Khaira from PSM - were arrested.

By 8.50pm Georgetown district police chief Gan Kong Meng asked the crowd - numbering around 100 as opposed to the 180 police personnel who had been mobilised - to "disperse in five minutes."

At that moment, about 10 persons suddenly appeared claiming to represent "those who support the ISA".

penang isa vigil 010810 ong jing cheng arrested Two more activists - lawyer Darshan Singh and Ong Jing Cheng (left) of Suaram - were subsequently taken by the police to Jelutong district police station.

Earlier, Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng said although this is a sad day as the ISA has been existence for 50 years, he hoped it would remind the people about the importance of freedom.

"In Malaysia, there is freedom of speech, but no freedom after speech," he said.

The DAP leader also said Penang has tried to broaden the space for freedom of speech by having the Speaker's Square at the Esplanade, which is a tourist spot.

penang isa vigil 010810 vigil in front of jelutong police station "It is very successful. So far no untoward incident has happened. It shows that Malaysians can exercise freedom of speech and able to reject extremism," he told a press conference after launching a DAP fundraising event in the morning.

"This is the path to national unity, to reject extremism and to perform well. Those who cannot perform, no matter what background, will be criticized," he stressed.

He said he was not making these comments as a former ISA victim, but as an 'an activist for freedom and democracy'.

"The ISA is anti-freedom, and together with other laws like the Official Secrets Act, Sedition and Publication and Printing Presses Act, should be abolished," he said.

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