

'Hold open debate on ISA'
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A Penang executive councillor said the federal government should listen to the people if it is serious about amending the Internal Security Act (ISA).

Local government, traffic management and environment committee chairperson Chow Kon Yeow said the government should organise a forum for open debate.

NONE He was commenting on police action against anti-ISA protestors who had attempted to hold a candlelight vigil on Sunday to mark the 50th anniversary of enforcement of the unpopular law.

Chow (right) reminded the police to be more respectful of the states' role in ensuring freedom of expression, saying that "preventing the people from exercising their rights will tarnish the police image".

He urged the police not to bring charges against the four activists who were arrested but have since been released on police bail.

Chow maintained that the Speaker's Square - selected as the venue for the abortive vigil - is open to everyone, including those who support the ISA, and that it will not be shut down.

Abolish ISA Movement representative Ong Jing Cheng accused the police of having been "rough and aggressive" in breaking up the planned peaceful candlelight vigil.

NONE "By right, the Speaker's Square is open to the public from 6-10pm, but the police had barricaded the place as early as 7pm. The arrests took place as early as 8.30pm when the vigil was only supposed to start at 9pm," he said.

Ong, who was among those arrested, accused the authorities of displaying "machine guns" and seizing the movement's banners.
'Unruly behaviour'

Ong also said the police should act against those who had attempted to create problems while the protestors gathered.

Penang pro-ISA thugs taken by Ong Boon Keong "Only by taking action against the gangsters can the police protect public peace. We strongly condemn the gangsterism and the barbaric culture that we witnessed that night," he said.

Chow, meanwhile, referred to a video clip by Malaysiakini citizen journalist Jimmy Leow Beng Hock, which depicts how the commotion began.

"Everyone will conclude from the clip that the police had condoned the (group which) sabotaged the rally," he added.

Georgetown OCPD Gan Kong Meng had earlier clarified that the police acted because they had received information that there would be trouble from a particular group.

He explained that the anti-ISA quartet were arrested because they did not comply with the police order to disperse within five minutes, unlike the pro-ISA group which had obeyed.

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