

Surau vandals claim they were 'provoked'
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The 13-year-old sister of one of the teenagers who had allegedly vandalised a newly-opened surau in Seremban, has lodged a police report claiming that her brother and his friends were "provoked" before the incident on Aug 23.

In her report, she said on Aug 20, prior to the surau being defaced three days later, the teenagers were involved in a confrontation that resulted in abusive language hurled against them.

Her report, dated Aug 24, stated that she was with her brother and five other friends at a playground close by the surau in Taman Pulai Impian in Temiang around 9pm to 10pm, where a group of some twenty men were also gathered.

"There was one Chinese man with them. All of a sudden that person threw firecrackers at us and we moved away to avoid them. That led to an argument and they tried to chase us from the playground," said the report.

She said that they pointed out that the playground was a public place.

"A Malay man in a red T-shirt and a songkok from the group became angry and called us babi (pigs).

"We demanded to know why they used such language against us. That was when another group of men came out from the surau and reprimanded us for 'bullying' the other group".

She explained that as her group refused to admit that they were at fault, the confrontation turned violent and one of the men, whom she claimed was from the surau, slapped her brother and chased them away.

A relative of the 13-year-old told Malaysiakini today that although the act of vandalism was "wrong" the authorities did not take into account of the behaviour of the group of adults.

"Only the children get punished but the others got off scot-free," she said, adding that it was unfair to blame only the teenagers.

'Vandalising a place of worship not justifiable'

Meanwhile, Negri Sembilan MCA chairperson Dr Yeow Chai Thiam asserted that whatever the argument or fight was about, the actions of the four teenagers are not justifiable.

Yeow said that he was aware of the report and added it explained that the vandalism was not intended as a "racial or religious" assault.

"(It) was because of a quarrel between youngsters which turned out to be emotional and (they) acted without thinking of the consequences of showing disrespect to a place of worship," he added.

The four boys were remanded on Aug 24 and brought to the court today. At press time, three have pleaded guilty and were released on RM2,000 bail each. They will be sentenced on Sept 22.

Their parents have since apologised to the surau committee and the local community over the incident.

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