

Police halt three opposition ceramah
Malaysiakini.com
Apr 24, 2007
Beh Lih Yi

The police stopped three 'ceramah' (talks) by Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) in Ijok last night claiming that they were illegal gatherings.

In the first incident, a large number of policemen, including members of the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU), barricaded a road leading to a PKR ceramah in Taman Pancaran, Bestari Selatan.

The ceramah was to be held at a PKR member's house at around 9.30pm and the opposition party's advisor Anwar Ibrahim was among those slated to give a speech. However, the police blocked the road as early as 8pm.

There were more policemen, including FRU personnel, stationed in trucks near the venue.

Some 50 metres away, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak was addressing about 200 people at a Barisan Nasional (BN) function.

At 9.45 pm, the organisers of the PKR ceramah told the 40 or so people who had gathered at the venue that the talk must be called off in view of the situation.

Following this, Kuala Selangor district police chief Ibrahim Chin (photo) told the organisers to disperse the crowd immediately or face action under the Police Act for holding an illegal gathering.

As the crowd began to disperse, a group of Umno Youth supporters, who were nearby, cheered and clapped.

They also sang the patriotic song 'Barisan Kita' and chanted 'Hidup BN' (Long Live BN) and 'Sedia Gempur' (Ready to Battle).

According to the police chief, there was a legal police permit for the BN gathering.

"If they (PKR) apply for a police permit (to hold the ceramah at a different time), I would consider it. If (the situation) is suitable, we would issue the permit, otherwise no," he said.

However, Ibrahim declined to comment on whether the police stopped the PKR event because Najib was attending a function in the vicinity.

'Double standards'

Following this, police stopped two other PKR 'ceramah' in Batang Berjuntai and Sungai Darah, where it was said that Najib would attend other BN functions.

In Batang Berjuntai, the police moved in when PKR deputy president Dr Syed Husin Ali was in the midst of giving a speech. Anwar had addressed the crowd about 15 minutes earlier.

Three other PKR 'ceramah', which also did not have police permits, went on as scheduled.

Local residents expressed disappointment with the police's action, and some jeered at the passing police trucks.

"I don't know why the police are doing this if they want to be fair. We just want to listen to what they (opposition leaders) have to say, BN will lose support (if they do such things)," said 39-year-old electrician A Balakrishnan.

"The locals are frightened because they are not used to this kind of atmosphere," added the Batang Berjuntai resident.

Estate worker Tioh Jioo Hin, 24, (photo) who had come to the 'ceramah' with his father, accused the authorities of practicing double standards.

Pointing to the BN 'ceramah' being held nearby, he said: "See, they have placed chairs all over the place and people can't even walk past [...] but we don't even have chairs here (at the PKR 'ceramah') and still got chased away."

PKR leaders, including candidate Khalid Ibrahim, also cried foul over the incident.

Election Commission (EC) secretary Kamarulzaman Mohd Noor said the Election Offences Act clearly stipulated the need for a police permit for 'ceramah' even during the campaigning period.

"The law is clear, you need to have a police permit. No matter if it is BN or PAS, the same law applies," he said when contacted today.

Instant permit?

However, PKR Youth leader and lawyer Latheefa Koya said the Election Offences Act does not stipulate any such rule and the matter fell under the Police Act.

"However, it will be hard for both parties to follow the normal procedure (under the Police Act) of getting a police permit because that will affect our election campaign.

"If we only have nine days of campaigning, how can we meet the 14-day advance notice to make an application?" she asked.

"In that sense, we are curious how BN got their permit? Is there an 'instant permit'?" she said, adding that the practice had been for political parties to inform the police in advance of their campaigning activities.

Latheefa also claimed that she was told by the Kuala Selangor police chief that the PKR 'ceramah' were cancelled because they were too close to Najib's functions.