

Apcet II: Megat ordered the mob attack
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Ex-deputy home minister Megat Junid Megat Ayob had ordered for an Umno Youth-led mob to stop an international conference on East Timor 11 years ago, a key witness in the 'Apcet II' suit told the court today.

Saifuddin Nasution Ismail, who was then Umno Youth secretary and had led the mob, also had the court in stitches when he revealed he was given a 'nasi kandar' treat by the police after the incident.

He was the seventh plaintiffs' witness in the RM83 million civil suit filed by 36 local activists and journalists against the Malaysian government and several police officers for wrongful detention and police negligence.

The 43-year-old - who had tendered a public apology over his role in the mob in 2001 - has since joined the Opposition after he was sacked by Umno in 1998. He was also the ex-Lunas state assemblyperson where he contested on the PKR ticket.

Megat Junid's instruction

In his testimony at the Kuala Lumpur High Court this morning, he recalled that the instruction to disrupt the conference was given to him by Megat Junid in a meeting held at the latter's office.

Also present were Youth leaders from other BN component parties - MCA, MIC and PPP, as well as Umno's Batu division head Azman Atar and several others whom he could not identify.

"Megat Junid started the meeting by telling us that a group of NGO activists will organise a seminar on East Timor in Kuala Lumpur. He said Malaysia's stand is that the seminar is not permitted, fearing that we will be seen as interfering into problems in Indonesia," he told the court.

"Megat Junid asked BN Youth to undertake the responsibility to stop the seminar as he said the government's stand must be respected. I was asked to lead this task in my capacity as the Umno Youth secretary since the Umno Youth chief and vice-chief were abroad then," he said.

"Megat Junid said Azman will head another group who will also be there. He said matters related to the police have been arranged and the police will arrive at the seminar hall in 30 minutes, where everything will be settled then.

"He added that a few of us might be arrested in this task," Saifuddin told the court.

At this juncture, plaintiffs' counsel Ranjit Singh asked Saifuddin to elaborate on Megat Junid's instruction.

Ranjit: Did Megat Junid tell you how to stop the conference?

Saifuddin: Megat Junid asked me to mobilise BN Youth members. Secondly, he told me - as

the head of the Barisan Bertindak Rakyat Malaysia (BBRM, the mob) - to meet with the Apcet II organisers at the hotel and tell them to stop the conference. Megat Junid said if the organisers refuse, I am to switch off their PA system.

Ranjit: You said "matters related to the police have been arranged", what does that mean?

Saifuddin: Megat Junid said in carrying out this task, few (BN Youth) members and I will be arrested but he told us not to worry because everything will be over if I can successfully perform the duty.

Judge Wan Adnan Muhamad interjected: So Megat Junid only ordered you to switch off the PA system?

Saifuddin: Yes.

Asked to elaborate on Azman's role, the witness said the former was known to be "an aggressive person and have a wide networking including those linked to the kaki-kaki pukul (gangsters)".

Participants unhappy

Continuing his testimony, Saifuddin said on the day of the incident, he and about 300 BN Youth members had gathered at a stadium close to the conference venue at 8am and after he briefed the members, they marched towards the hotel.

He said many other BN Youth members were already present outside the hotel when they arrived and the Federal Reserve Unit personnel were stationed at the hotel entrance.

"As the number of those gathered grew, some of them had already broke through the FRU barrier and went up to the conference venue," he said, adding that he also followed suit.

"As we arrived in the conference room, the door was closed and some of us tried to open the door. After it was opened, we went inside the room. The dining tables were scattered," he added.

According to Saifuddin, he and Tajuddin Rahman - who is now Pasir Salak Umno division head - took turns to ask the conference participants to disperse while the police led by Dang Wangi OCPD Zainal Abidin Ali only arrived about an hour later.

"I overheard there were participants who were unhappy with our presence and asked the police to instruct us to leave the conference so that they could proceed with the conference. I objected and told Zainal that we will only leave after the conference is halted and the participants had left.

"Zainal then told me that I was arrested," he told the court. Apart from him, several other Umno Youth leaders were also arrested.

Asked what happened at the police station, Saifuddin said the police recorded a statement from him but the process was not completed.

"They asked for my name, position and address. As I was telling them what I was doing at the conference venue, another police officer invited me to another room where nasi kandar was

served," he said to the amusement of those present in court.

He was released after the nasi kandar treat. Saifuddin was charged in court later for disrupting the conference. He pleaded guilty and was fined RM1,500.

The hearing was adjourned to Aug 15-16 as the team of federal counsel had requested for another date to cross-examine Saifuddin. The court will also continue with the cross-examination on the sixth witness, R Sivarasa.

Irrelevant questions

Earlier, Senior Federal Counsel Iznan Ishak objected to three questions in Saifuddin's witness statement explaining why the latter was sacked from Umno in 1998 and his current political involvement.

Justice Wan Adnan upheld Iznan's arguments that the questions were irrelevant to the case.

On Nov 9, 1996, over 100 people - including 10 journalists - were arrested on the opening day of the Second Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor (Apcet II), held to discuss human rights abuses in East Timor and its struggle for independence from Indonesia.

As the conference was about to begin, 400 members from the Umno Youth-led BBRM, or Malaysia's People's Action Front, broke down the doors of the conference halls, threw chairs and verbally and physically abused the participants.

Police then moved in to arrest the participants who were detained between one and six days, while 40 foreign participants were deported.

Online daily malaysiakini chief executive officer Premesh Chandran and editor-in-chief Steven Gan, both then journalists at The Sun, are also among the plaintiffs.

The plaintiffs have named the government, then Inspector General of Police Abdul Rahim Mohd Noor and two senior police officers - then Kuala Lumpur chief police officer Ismail Che Rose and then Dang Wangi OCPD Zainal Abidin Ali - as respondents.

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