

Are the police sabotaging BN?
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OPINION Sunday, August 1, marked the 50th Anniversary of the ISA. It was a milestone that had to be observed by every caring Malaysian. It was an occasion that deserved to be commemorated.

This evil Act has been with us for 50 years serving as a convenient and useful political tool to keep the ruling elite in power. For 50 years, this Act has terrorised innocent people. Some 10,000 people lost their freedom because they were detained under the ISA which gives them no recourse to the courts.

Their detention is at the pleasure of the Minister of Home Affairs. He is legally empowered to detain any Malaysian indefinitely by simply extending their detention orders every two years. No court of law can question the minister's detention orders. As long as he is of the opinion that an individual is a threat to national security, he can order the detention.

Such an unjust law has to be opposed. It was only logical that on the 50th Anniversary of the existence of this obnoxious legislation, peaceful Malaysians should commemorate this important occasion. In this instance, they held candlelight vigil in eight states on August 1, the 50th anniversary of the enactment of this Act.

This candlelight vigil would have taken place peacefully without any incidence — if only those gathered had been allowed to do so. Surely Malaysians are entitled to the freedom to light a candle, sing a few songs, deliver a few speeches and go home.

NGO events such as this don't normally attract a mammoth crowd. At most only a few hundred people turn up. There was no public urging for Malaysians to turn up in their thousands.

So why was this peaceful gathering stopped? What was achieved?

The police action only made those present even angrier with the Barisan Nasional — not with the police. They were aware that the police only act on the orders of the BN — more implicitly on the instructions of the Umno ministers.

In Penang, when I arrived at around 8.50 pm I witnessed some activists being herded into a truck and carted away even before the event could take place at 9.00 pm. There were more police personnel present than people who had come to attend the function. They outnumbered those present by almost two to one. The police were ordering the people to disperse but they lingered on. What was inspiring was the fact that there was no fear among the people. No one ran helter-skelter. They stayed put.

At about 9.30 pm, my wife and I went to the Jelutong Police Station, where the four detainees were taken to. There were at least 50 Malaysians holding up lit candles and moving to a vantage position to attract the attention of passers-by. We bought a packet of candles and joined the group.

Motorists passing us on both sides honked their horns expressing their support. As more and more cars and motorbikes passed, their honking grew louder and more persistent. One cyclist even rang his bell!

When it became evident that the people were in support of the cause that we represented, that was when the police moved in and dispersed us. Even then, some did not go home. They stayed on at nearby coffee shops until it was time to free the detainees. Four of those still hanging around went into the police station to bail them out.

The people have a right to be angry with the BN. The police were tolerant of the pro-Umno group who came there to be unruly. They were provocative and were a nuisance. They came to cause mischief and disrupt the peaceful event to mark the 50th anniversary of the ISA. They supported the ISA. They could have held their own function elsewhere to express their support for the ISA. But why come here to wreck a peaceful event?

Why were they not apprehended? Why were the police tolerant of this group?

According to a Malaysiakini report: "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.'"

They tried to "create trouble and agitate" and how were they treated in comparison to those who were arrested? It was clearly a case of double standards.

Ordinary Malaysians are not naive. They see the difference and they understand the biased treatment.

This conduct is not a plus sign for the BN. It is definitely a minus sign. The police action only makes the people turn against the BN.

The BN must realise that the police action is only sabotaging the BN. — Aliran

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