

## **Are Activists More Dangerous Than Criminals?**

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The way the police hound and harass activists engaged in social issues gives the impression that they are more dangerous than the criminals who cause hell for peace-loving citizens.

The number of police engaged in this activity makes one wonder why the police are running after these activists instead of the criminals who are lurking among our midst committing all kinds of crimes, some even resulting in death.

More and more Malaysians are beginning to believe that the police are no longer what they used to be in the past when they were professional in their duty and were not seen as political tools of the ruling party.

The change in perception occurred during the Mahathir years as witnessed during the Refomasi days and while Anwar's first sodomy trial dragged on when the police were harsh and brutal in dealing with the crowd who stood up against a cruel regime.

We have seen how heavy-handed the police were during the Bersih 1.0 and Hindraf rallies in November 2007. They continue to behave in that same fashion right up to today.

Yesterday (25-6-11), 31 PSM members, including the Sungai Siput MP, Jeyakumar Devaraj, were detained at the Sungai Dua toll plaza at about 3.45pm. They were on their way to Penang after leafleting in Kedah when they were apprehended.

These activists were then taken to Kepala Batas Police Station in Seberang Perai Utara for questioning. Top-ranking Penang state police officers were seen at the police station.

According to Jeyakumar, they were expecting to be released on police bail, but all of them were then detained in lock-ups. The women were detained at the Kepala Batas police station, while the men were taken to the Butterworth police station.

About the same time as the activists were detained at the Sungai Dua toll plaza in the north, PSM activists who had been leafleting in the south were detained in Tangkak and taken to the Ledang police station and subjected to the same harrowing experience. But they were released at 4.00am this morning, after 12 hours with the police.

One is tempted to ask, is this the reason why we have a police force - to deny the fundamental rights of citizens, making the constitutional provisions granting them these rights meaningless?

This is a sheer waste of time for everybody concerned in this episode. The police should not be tied down in a case where there was clearly no threat to the nation. The activists should not be wasting their precious time doing nothing when they have their work to carry out which has been unfairly disrupted.

Four lawyers who had turned up at the Kepala Batas Police Station last night were blocked from meeting the detainees. This is completely unwarranted; it is a basic right of detainees to have access to their lawyers. There is no justification for this refusal; it goes against natural justice.

The activists have now been remanded for seven days, the application granted at the

Butterworth Magistrates Court. They are now being demonised in the media.

All these activists were engaged in legitimate, democratic activity which is guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. Leafleting is not criminal; educating the public on issues is not an offence. They are not engaged in violent or armed struggle.

The police have been going after activists similarly engaged in Johor and Shah Alam. And anyone wearing a T-shirt with the word Bersih (Clean) is hauled away. What have we come to? Why are the police targeting this group of people?

It is tied to BN's fear of the Bersih 2.0's Walk for Democracy Rally on 9 July.

This rally promises to draw unprecedented huge crowds. The sheer number of participants will debunk the BN's claim that Malay support has swung back to Umno. It would be such a humiliation for Umno, which is pretending to be brave and masquerading as the champion of the Malays.

July 9 will be the defining moment in Malaysian politics. Umno is not prepared to face this truth.

So the BN is using the police to stop the Bersih 2.0 rally on 9 July. It has to be stopped at all costs for the survival of the BN.

We will know on 9 July whether Malaysians have been cowed by fear; whether they will choose to snivel and quiver or will cast aside their shackles once and for all.

Will 9 July be an epoch-making day? Only time will tell

**P RAMAKRISHNAN - 26 June 2011**

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