

Withdraw punishment against picture-stomping teens, Pakatan tells PM
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 8 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers have urged Putrajaya to withdraw all punishments against those who trampled or mooned over photographs of the country's leaders last week, saying a verbal reprimand should be sufficient to teach the offenders a lesson.

The lawmakers said that while the unruly acts should not be condoned, the authorities should take note that they had been committed by teenagers who had merely failed to keep their emotions in check.

Proceeding with police action against these teens, added the lawmakers, would subject the youths to public embarrassment and destroy their futures.

"I demand that the prime minister intervene and match his supposed forgiveness with deeds in kind," PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar told The Malaysian Insider.

Nurul Izzah is sad that a 19-year-old student has been expelled from college for mooning over photographs of Najib and his wife.

The Lembah Pantai MP said she was saddened that the 19-year-old student who admitted to mooning over the photographs had been expelled from college, saying this could have destroyed all future educational opportunities for the youth.

The police had earlier arrested the boy for his actions while another teenager has also come forward to admit fault over trampling on the prime minister's picture.

The police are investigating the matter under the Sedition Act 1948, a pre-independence law that the Najib administration recently said it plans to repeal.

"Notwithstanding my disagreement with his actions, I believe he deserves a second chance, especially considering his Perkasa counterparts enjoy a life of lawlessness and unending protection by the government of the day," Nurul Izzah said.

Apart from Nurul Izzah, many other opposition politicians have railed against the authorities for acting so speedily to reprimand the youths for the incident when they had failed to do the same against pro-Umno, pro-BN and Perkasa activists who had in the past committed the same offences.

The Malay right-wing group Perkasa had in May this year organised a mock funeral for Penang Chief Minister and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng.

The group's leaders, as well as other pro-Umno activists, have also held numerous protests where the photographs of prominent Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders and civil society activists like Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan were trampled on or even torched.

Shortly after the Bersih 3.0 rally in the city, a group of army veterans had also performed butt exercises outside Ambiga's home.

"They are the ones who started this. Now, they're dealing with it in such a high-handed manner instead of teaching them to use ethical and mature politics," PAS MP Khalid Samad said.

His party's vice-president Datuk Mahfuz Omar said that while he disagreed with the youths' actions, the police should be more focused on their duties — to fight crime and not punish youths for delinquent behaviour.

"I think it is very clear that Umno, Barisan Nasional (BN) are merely using this latest incident for their political gain.

"They want to paint a bad picture of PR, saying that only BN can guarantee a civilised society... but if the police are so serious about these cases, then why haven't they taken similar action against Perkasa leaders who in the past committed even worse acts against others," said DAP Socialist Youth chief Anthony Loke.

He agreed that the police probe against those involved in the picture-stepping incident should be called off and all punishment withdrawn, saying the public embarrassment and apologies issued by the two teens should be enough.

Mahfuz said the police should be more focused on their duties — to fight crime and not punish youths for delinquent behaviour.

"We are not encouraging others to follow in their footsteps but if they are punished this way, indeed it will be a backlash on the government and it will further polarise society," he said.

PAS Muslimat wing vice-president Mumtaz Md Nawawi agreed, saying the authorities should instead focus on the issues that had provoked the teenagers to behave the way they did.

"The real issues are crime is high, petrol prices were just hiked; these caused teens do lose respect for their leaders. If they had respect, they would not be pushed to do what they did," Mumtaz said.

A firestorm erupted last week after several individuals were recorded tearing up posters bearing images of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, his wife and Election Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof during a pro-democracy gathering on the eve of National Day at Dataran Merdeka in the federal capital.

Several other people were spotted waving a flag with an alternative design — now identified as the Sang Saka Malaya — instead of the Jalur Gemilang on August 30. Two youths were yesterday arrested over the incident.

Bukit Aman's CID director Datuk Seri Mohd Bakri Zinin told The Malaysian Insider that the police were probing the two separate incidents under the Sedition Act — despite Putrajaya's decision to repeal the controversial law that has been widely panned as a tool to curb political dissent.

Mohd Bakri said the police were probing the flag incident as an attempt to incite hatred with intent to create public disorder under section 4 (1)(a) of the Sedition Act 1948.

He added that stepping on pictures of Najib and wife were considered offences under sections 290 and 504 of the Penal Code for being public nuisances and intentionally causing insult with an intent to provoke break the public peace, respectively.

Those convicted under section 290 may be fined up to RM400 while those found guilty under section 504 are liable to be jailed up to two years or fined, or both.

However, section 4 (1)(a) of the Sedition Act prescribes a mandatory jail term of three years or a fine of up to RM5,000 for first offenders, which is subsequently raised to five years' jail for repeat offences.

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