

Pakatan: Arrests of Nik Aziz, Guan Eng picture-stompers 'insincere'
Malaysian Insider
September 17, 2012
By Lisa J Ariffin

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 17 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders today dismissed the arrests of several individuals who stomped and urinated on the photographs of their leaders as a mere knee-jerk response from the authorities, following harsh criticism from the public over their handling of similar incidents during National Day last month.

PKR vice-president N Surendran pointed out that the arrests had only been made after the Home Ministry and the police were slammed for the speedy action they had taken against the group of youths who stomped on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's photograph during a street celebration of Malaysia's 55th National Day at Dataran Merdeka.

"The only reason (Home Minister Datuk Seri) Hishammuddin (Hussein) has gone after those who did that to opposition leaders is because of public criticism on the one sided way the police have gone after those who did the same to the PM's photos," Surendran told The Malaysian Insider.

DAP national publicity chief Tony Pua echoed his colleague's sentiments, and said: "The urinating act was more than a few months ago. Have they been charged?"

"Or are these 'arrests' afterthoughts after Malaysians complain at the police bias of investigating only when Najib's picture is 'damaged'?" he asked.

"If Hishammuddin is truly unbiased, then scores of people would have been charged and found guilty to date for Umno and Perkasa members have trampled, torn, burnt and desecrated on pictures of PR leaders since 2008," he added.

PAS leader and Shah Alam MP Khalid Samad lamented if the police had taken action against the perpetrators "from the beginning", it would have "stopped all these crazy political gangsterism and activities which are not condoned by anybody with a reasonable and sound mind".

"They (the police) have to wait until the PM's photos are stepped on, and they're criticised for not taking action, then only they acted... It is a bit disappointing," he said.

"It shows they have double standards and are not serious in overcoming the problem of gangsterism and unethical political action," he added.

Surendran, however, urged that no criminal action be taken upon those arrested.

"We believe leaders must be open to criticism by the people and even if the criticisms are rude and distasteful as in the case of the fellow who urinated on photographs of PR leaders," he said.

He added the coalition was against criminal action taken against those involved as it was "wrong, because under the federal constitution there is freedom of expression".

"As long as it's non-violent, don't turn it into a criminal matter. Like those who jumped on the PM's photos, it is distasteful but not criminal.

"It may be rude, distasteful and disgusting but we must defend the people's right to do it. They are both not criminal matters."

A firestorm erupted last month after several individuals were recorded tearing up posters bearing images of the prime minister, his wife and Election Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof at the "Janji Demokrasi" rally on August 30.

Several other people also were spotted waving a flag with an alternative design — now identified as the Sang Saka Malaya — instead of the Jalur Gemilang at the National Day bash.

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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