

**DAP: Special police panel on custodial deaths a waste of time**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 30 — Putrajaya's refusal to heed calls for the setting up of a police oversight in the wake of more custodial deaths while proposing a special police panel to address the issue shows the government is not taking the matter seriously, a DAP leader said today.

The party's Puchong lawmaker Gobind Singh Deo (picture) said the mere suggestion for a "committee" came despite a Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) having strongly recommended the setting up of the Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC) to address the alarming rise in deaths in detention.

"The suggestion to set up a special police panel on custodial deaths is clear proof of the fact that the police and the Ministry of Home Affairs have not taken deaths in police custody in the past seriously.

"This is strange. There has been a RCI which resulted in the proposal of the IPCMC," said Gobind in a statement.

The DAP leader also cited how the inquiry into the death of former DAP aide Teoh Beng Hock, who died under mysterious circumstances while being questioned by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), had made criticisms and specific recommendations to prevent more custodial deaths.

But Gobind said despite the reprimand, Putrajaya has yet to show any sign that it is serious about tackling the problem as people continue to die in detention, with the most recent case being the death of N. Dharmendran who was beaten to death while he was being detained in the city police headquarters earlier this month.

"This matter has been raised in Parliament many times and in the last session, the Ministry of Home Affairs assured the House that steps were being taken to solve the problems.

"But now we see how it is that this cannot be true. The police are suggesting a committee only now. This must be a joke because whilst people are dying, the police seem to be dragging their feet, saying they will look into it, when in actual fact they have yet to even set up a committee for this purpose," he said.

The Najib administration is now facing a strong renewed demand for the IPCMC to be established after Dharmendran's death sparked a nationwide uproar.

A pathologist report issued eight days ago showed the 31-year-old had been murdered but the police have yet to charge anyone, drawing accusations that there is an attempt to cover up the case.

Following public pressure, newly-appointed Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar has pledged to set up a panel to look into the custodial deaths issue but Gobind said the announcement was least convincing as the force has yet to outline any concrete solution to tackle the problem to this day.

"For example, he should tell us why in the case of Dharmendran, no one has been charged as yet despite the medical evidence clearly pointing towards homicide.

"Until he can convince us that there have been genuine efforts to change, he cannot be taken seriously in his call for a special committee, especially one which is to be headed by he himself," he said.

Dharmendran's death joins a list of other alleged police killings like the custodial deaths of Chang Chin Te earlier this year as well as A. Kugan and R. Gunasegaran in 2009; the deadly police shooting of 14-year-old schoolboy Aminulrasyid Amzah in 2010; and various other fatal police shootings in the past two years.

According to rights group Suaram, there were 218 cases of alleged deaths in custody in Malaysia from 2000 to this month, with its records showing that nine of those cases occurred in 2012, while five cases took place this year.

A United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention 2010 visit to Malaysian prisons and detention centres reported in 2011 that between 2003 and 2007, "over 1,500 people died while being held by authorities."

The Bar Council, civil society groups and several politicians from both sides of the divide have called for an IPCMC to reform the police force since 2006.

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