

DAP leader calls Zahid, IGP 'thugs' after latest death in police custody
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A fifth custodial death in a Penang police lock-up has led a DAP lawmaker to accuse the Home Minister and the Inspector-General of Police of acting like "thugs".

Deputy Chief Minister II Dr P. Ramasamy blasted Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar following the latest death in custody.

M. Murugan, 37, died at the Seberang Jaya Hospital on Saturday while in police custody.

He said the family of the deceased, who was arrested on suspicion of drug possession on March 31 from his home in Prai, had claimed that the man was beaten while he was detained at the Seberang Prai Tengah district police headquarters in Bandar Perda, Bukit Mertajam.

They saw bruises and injury markings on his back, right shoulder, arm, thigh and chest when they cleaned his body for funeral rites.

"This is yet another death in custody. It is shocking that a man can just die. We heard that a doctor at the hospital had claimed that Murugan died of his beatings," he said in a press conference at Ramasamy's service centre in Prai today.

Reporters were shown pictures of his injuries that were taken by an acquaintance of Ramasamy's aide 10 days after Murugan was admitted into hospital.

The death certificate stated that Murugan died of severe sepsis secondary to pneumonia.

Ramyee, 56, a cleaner, said her son was first admitted at the Bukit Mertajam hospital for five days before he was transferred to the Seberang Jaya Hospital.

"He was conscious sometimes and unconscious sometimes. He had trouble remembering what happened. He recognised me sometimes and said he was in pain.

"The police guarded him very closely and even family members are not allowed to go near his bed to talk to him," she said, adding that she remembered seeing his arms bandaged.

Ramasamy, who is Prai assemblyman, said Murugan, an odd job worker, was Ramyee's only son and he left behind a wife and three school-going children.

"They hastily cremated the deceased on Sunday because they were afraid that if they delayed it, they might be victimised.

"They actually thought the police might arrest another family member if they did not immediately proceed with the funeral," he said.

The family deserves to get justice for Murugan, he said, adding that such incidents normally happen to poor and underprivileged individuals.

Ramasamy said unless something serious is done about this issue, death in custody incidents will not be solved.

He also criticised the federal government for repeatedly failing to implement the recommendations of the Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC) on police misconduct.

"We call for an investigation but we do not expect the police to do it. We want to work closely with the police but we cannot tolerate this.

"It is as if the people have no protection. If they are detained, there is no guarantee that they will walk out alive," he said.

It was reported last year that Amnesty International urged Malaysia to take steps to stop the alarming number of deaths in police custody. At least 12 people are known to have died in police custody in 2013, up from nine for all of 2012.

In Penang this year, there are five such cases reported. The first happened on February 10 in the Nibong Tebal police station, followed by the second on March 1 in the Bayan Baru centralised lockup.

The third case happened on March 8. The man Kamarulnizam Ismail was detained at the Seberang Prai Tengah district police headquarters in Bandar Perda before he was sent to the Tapah prison. He died a day after arriving at the prison and his family has alleged that he was beaten up in Bandar Perda.

The fourth case happened on April 6 at the Penang Prison.

Penang crime investigation department chief senior assistant commissioner Mazlan Kesah said he will look into Ramasamy's claim. – April 15, 2014

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