

2 MPs among 29 in remand for anti-GST protest

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By Low Han Shaun

Dr Mohd Hatta Ramli of PAS and Dr Michael Jeyakumar Devaraj of Parti Sosialis Malaysia are among the 29 detained and under remanded for two days after protesting against the goods and services tax (GST) yesterday.

Hatta, the Kuala Krai MP, and Dr Michael Jeyakumar, the Sungai Siput MP, were detained when they and more than a hundred others staged a sit-in protest outside the building of the Customs Department in Kelana Jaya, Petaling Jaya, yesterday.

PSM secretary-general S. Arutchelvan was also among those detained and remanded.

A total of 80 people were arrested at the sit-in, and three more were hauled up last night at a vigil outside the Kelana Jaya police station for the detained.

Lawyer Dinesh Muthal, who confirmed that the two MPs were being held in remand, said that the detainees were denied access to legal counsel until this afternoon, and lawyers did not have enough time to talk to their clients before the remand hearing was held today.

"It is not fair for the people who were detained yesterday to be denied meeting their lawyers, the police should have let us have a chance to discuss with them first before the remand hearing," he said.

Police today obtained the two-day remand orders for the 29 at the Shah Alam police station, where the remand hearing was held in two sessions.

Two of the 29 detainees, who sustained injuries, will be allowed to seek medical attention and lodge police reports during the remand period, said another lawyer Muhammad Zaki Sukero from PAS's legal and human rights bureau, or Jabatan Undang-undang Hak Asasi Manusia (Juham).

Of the 29 in remand, 26 were detained at the Customs Department office in Kelana Jaya during the sit-in, while three others were detained at a vigil held outside the Kelana Jaya police station last night where those detained at the sit-in were being held.

Those in remand will be investigated under the Penal Code and the Peaceful Assembly Act, lawyers said.

The anti-GST protest yesterday was organised by PSM and Gabungan Bantah GST, a coalition of activists opposed to the consumption tax.

The goal of the sit-in was to get the Customs Department to answer some 100 questions on the GST.

Putrajaya is facing stiff criticism over the 6% tax that will kick in on April 1, especially over the lack of clarity on the system's implementation and fears of profiteering traders who will take advantage of the confusion to raise prices indiscriminately.

The arrest of anti-GST protestors yesterday has been roundly condemned by opposition parties and civil society, and PSM activist Sivarajan Arumugam earlier today said it was wrong for the Inspector General of Police to say that demonstrators had "trespassed" the Customs office as the counters set up there to handle public enquiries on GST were for public use.

"We are puzzled. How we can have been trespassing into a government building when we were visiting the public information GST counter available on the ground floor of the building? Does it mean all citizens visiting the public information counter are trespassers?" he said. – March 24, 2015.

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