


Of City Hall and a balloon vendor

Why do we find it hard to be on our best behaviour during Ramadan?

CITY Hall has been in the news for the past few days, but for all the wrong reasons. On Saturday, its officers were accused of roughing up a balloon vendor in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman. This is not the first time. Don't get us wrong. The balloon seller was wrong in peddling his wares without a licence. He should be warned off or at the most fined. But to rough him up so badly that he had to get treatment at a hospital is to disrespect the rule of law. Some City Hall officers think that their attire licenses their hands to go wherever they please. Such officers don't deserve City Hall's uniform. What they deserve, though, is prison attire.

To be sure, such incidents will always have two versions. It would have been helpful if the City Hall officers wore body cameras, but they didn't. City Hall appears to have bought its officers' version of the incident, with its statement saying that the balloon vendor was warned three times before action was taken against him, adding that he was aggressive towards the officers. The action taken by the officers was left unsaid. But City Hall has assured a thorough investigation into the incident. It has also promised a revamp of the enforcement standard operating procedure, if necessary. We would have thought earlier incidents of a similar nature would have necessitated such a revamp. The officers involved in the incident have since lodged a police report. But a viral video of the incident tells a different story. The close to 60-second video shows several City Hall officers pushing the balloon vendor to the ground, leading to a commotion that shouldn't have happened. Little wonder, the media reports are all about how City Hall roughed up a poor balloon vendor. What is sad is that such incidents are allowed to happen during Ramadan, a month that emphasises compassion.

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City Hall needs to learn a few lessons from this incident. Firstly, it must not think it is a money-making outfit for the government, so much so that it charges a humongous licensing fee for vendors to ply their trade. License them by all means, but be realistic. How much can a balloon or petai or mineral water bottle vendor afford to pay? The latter two small traders were involved in similar scuffles with overzealous enforcement officers, both during Ramadan. City Hall should encourage small vendors to make a living by charging a nominal fee. This Ramadan, many traders stayed away from bazaars because of the fees imposed by City Hall.

Secondly, it should be transparent about its investigations. All we hear are promises of investigations, but never the findings. If City Hall is wondering why there is such an outcry against its officers, the reason is this: people are finding them to be taking the law into their own hands. What is worse, the people feel that the guilty are not punished. Can't blame them. One hardly hears miscreant City Hall officers being held accountable.