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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 5 — Police have arrested 16 people including Human Rights Party leader P. Uthayakumar as they were attempting to march from Masjid Jamek to Dataran Merdeka here tonight for a candlelight vigil protesting last week's cow-head demonstration by Section 23 residents in Shah Alam.

Authorities had closed off access to the square to prevent the group of about 50 demonstrators from carrying out the vigil.

The group first gathered near Central Market at about 7.30 pm and made their way towards the Masjid Jamek LRT station where they started lighting candles and distributing placards to supporters.

The placards read "Threat and insulting the religion of others is condoned by the government, where is justice?" and "Umno must repent".

The group's message echoed those of Pakatan Rakyat leaders, who believe the racially charged cow-head protest was instigated by Umno, the dominant party in the ruling Barisan Nasional.

As they marched towards Dataran Merdeka, Uthayakumar and Hindraf coordinator S. Jayathas led the march with songs as others followed them.

The singing didn't last long as police soon moved in to detain the protesters, among them Uthayakumar's fiancée S. Indradevi, despite the group heeding police orders to disperse and leave the area.

Also arrested were Hindraf leader and Uthayakumar's brother P. Waytha Moorthy's wife and sister.

Uthayakumar, who recently returned from medical treatment abroad, was seen manhandled by the police despite not resisting while his fiancée was roughly pushed and dragged into the police truck.

All 16 were later taken to the Dang Wangi police station to have their statement taken.

In a statement from his London base, Waytha Moorthy said he was appalled by the arrests, saying it was a deliberate and calculated attempt to target the main leaders of Hindraf so that the planned candle vigil would be foiled.

“Those vigil participants were going with candles and roses when they were arrested. PM Najib’s 1Malaysia is a shame to all democracy-loving Malaysians.

“It is ridiculous that the Muslim extremist cow head protesters – with blood still dripping from the head – who behaved in violent manner, delivered fiery speeches promoting racial hatred and insulted Hindus were given full police protection whilst Hindraf supporters who were armed with unlit candles and roses were violently arrested, bundled and taken into police lock ups,” said Waytha Moorthy who lives in self-exile.

He branded the government and police as fascists who did not have any respect for the Federal Constitution, which provides for freedom of assembly, equality and freedom of religion.

In last week’s protest in Shah Alam, around 50 residents from Section 23 marched towards the Selangor state secretariat building after Friday prayers to protest the planned relocation of a Hindu temple to their housing area.

Police arrest Uthayakumar, 15 others in aborted candlelight vigil

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The protesters brandished a severed cow's head during the protest, which was observed by the police. No arrests were made then or since.

Today, Selangor menteri besar Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim announced the relocation will now be temporarily put on hold, following an abortive Shah Alam town hall meeting called this morning to discuss the growing controversy.