

# Malaysia: Government arrests socialists ahead of Bersih 2.0 pro-democracy rally

Tuesday 28 June 2011, by [Correspondent\(s\)](#) (Date first published: 27 June 2011).

**Urgent appeal for protest letters to be sent to the Malaysian government, please visit <http://www.parti-sosialis.org/en/en/articles/1585> for details of where they can be sent.**

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June 27, 2011 — *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal* — At least 31 members of the Socialist Party of Malaysia (Parti Sosialis Malaysia, PSM) — including member of parliament Dr Michael Jeyakumar — have been detained by police. The Malaysian government is whipping up a massive red-scare campaign around the Bersih 2.0 rally planned for July 9 (see statement below), and is increasingly resorting to repression to try to prevent an expected huge attendance.

The PSM on June 17 announced it would mobilise its members and related organisations to participate in the July 9 rally. The PSM stated that: “July 9 is an important juncture in our nation’s history. It is a day devoted to democracy and fair elections. We call all people who are for democracy and fair elections to come out and support the call for democratic and fair elections. History has taught us that the struggle for democracy and freedom does not come in a silver platter.”

On June 24, the PSM also launched a separate “Udahlah ... Bersaralah (Enough ...Retire)” campaign directed at the authoritarian ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition government. As part of the campaign, two teams of PSM members began three-day agitation tours of the north and south of Malaysia.

On the eve the tours, PSM leader Dr Jeyakumar told Free Malaysia Today that the BN has been diverted from its original path of uniting all Malaysians and is engaged in a divide and rule policy by playing on race and religion. Jeyakumar said there was economic development for the people during Tun Abdul Razak’s term but now only the elite in BN are enjoying the economic cake of the country.

The Sungai Siput MP said that most Malaysians will suffer economically and financially if BN is returned to power. He outlined the contributing factors to the gloomy financial outlook for the nation:

\* BN will implement a goods and services tax (GST), which will affect those in the lower and middle income groups. The initial rate of GST is 5% but this will go up, as it has in Singapore which started with 3%, but now the figure has jumped to 7%.

\* BN will privatise all hospitals, thus pushing up health costs in its efforts to promote health tourism among foreigners.

\* BN will also privatise education, making it difficult for most Malaysians to send their children for further education locally.

\* Labour laws will be amended to weaken the bargaining power of the workforce by making local companies not answerable to labour disputes or problems. This will be done by outsourcing to contractors, who will be made the fall guys for any labour problems arising.

\* BN will sign the free trade agreements (FTA) with Europe and USA and the cost of consumer goods like medication for life-threatening diseases like AIDs and cancer will rise beyond the reach of most Malaysians.

## **Arrests**

On June 24, PSM secretary-general S. Arutchelvan and 28 PSM supporters travelled from Johor Baru to Kuala Lumpur in a chartered bus. Another PSM convoy took off from Ipoh to Perlis on the same day, reported Free Malaysia Today. Their mission was to inform the public that BN had to be removed after 54 years of alleged misrule and the pitfall of returning BN to power in the general election. However both the convoys faced police obstructions in the form of roadblocks. Arutchelvan's group was stopped by the police in Ledang (Johor) and each of them were subjected to body searches for hidden weapons. The bus was also searched.

Arutchelvan said the police delayed their journey by about 150 minutes before taking them to the Ledang police station to record their statements. They were eventually released at 4 am on June 25 on police bail. They were informed that they will be charged with illegal assembly, publishing pamphlets and leaflets, and sedition.

Meanwhile, the PSM group consisting of 31 people led by Jeyakumar that went north from Ipoh to Perlis was detained by police at the Sungai Dua toll plaza in Kepala Batas in Penang, on suspicion of allegedly carrying dangerous weapons and being in possession of inflammatory materials. Jeyakumar's personal assistant S. Nagenteran told Free Malaysia Today that the detained group was forced to give two separate statements to the police - one on the evening of June 25 while another at 2 am on June 26 before they were detained at three police stations at about 4 am.

Fourteen male members of the group are being detained at the Butterworth police station while another 14 women are held at the Kepala Batas police station. Three under-aged youths are being held at the Sungai Dua police station. Nagenteran said lawyers were denied access to the group members.

Thirty have been remanded until July 2 by the Butterworth Magistrate's Court, while a 16-year-old teenager was released unconditionally.

Police also dispersed about 20 NGO members who had gathered in front of the Sungai Dua police station to hold a candlelight vigil. Two people were arrested for illegal assembly as well.

Penang deputy police chief Abdul Rahim Jaafar said the 30 activists led by Jeyakumar were deemed to be a threat to national security.

"They were carrying items inciting the people to hate the government. This is serious and can threaten national security", he was quoted as saying. Police also claim they seized various items associated with the "Malayan Communist Party ideology" from the activists.

The PSM dismissed this accusation.

PSM secretary-general Arutchelvan accused the police of being extremely paranoid over the July 9 Bersih rally. He told Free Malaysia Today that they were abusing their powers in arresting people who were exercising their democratic rights in speech and action.

"The police are extremely paranoid about the Bersih rally and are unnecessarily harassing people by curbing their freedom of action by putting unnecessary police road blocks. They [the police] are not acting according to the law and are carrying out orders from higher ups. They do not see whether their actions are legally right or wrong but merely following orders [from their political masters]", Arutchelvan pointed out.

"We are being used by the police as a pawn to give psychological fear to the participants of the Bersih rally. The police are giving vague reasons of some imaginary threats to the country and it is ridiculous for them to build up (a vague theory) that our country is facing a big problem.

"It is a ridiculous charge based on three T-shirts [bearing images of former communist fighters Chin Peng and Rashid Mydin] found among the belongings of the PSM supporters," Arutchelvan said. "Anyone can buy such T-shirts ... and it is absurd to bring such wild charges against our party members and supporters."

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## **Press statement: Launch of Perhimpunan BERSIH 2.0**

The Bersih 2.0 rally is named after the pro-democracy mass rally on that took place on November 10, 2007. On June 19, the Bersih organisers released the following statement.

### **Launch of Perhimpunan BERSIH 2.0**

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH 2.0) believes that a working democracy is built upon the foundation of clean, free and fair elections. Therefore, the role of the Election Commission (EC) in conducting elections with integrity and impartiality is crucial in the democratisation of the nation.

The electoral system of this country is marred with irregularities, electoral offences and rampant abuse of powers. As the EC has not made any marked efforts in initiating changes towards a clean and fair electoral system, BERSIH 2.0 has decided to organise a rally to intensify pressure in light of the upcoming 13<sup>th</sup> General Elections.

Today marks less than three weeks before Perhimpunan BERSIH 2.0 takes place on 9 July 2011. Perhimpunan BERSIH 2.0 is intended to promote democracy and call for much needed electoral reform.

These are the 8 immediate demands for Perhimpunan BERSIH 2.0:

#### ***1. Clean the electoral roll***

The electoral roll is marred with irregularities such as deceased persons and multiple persons registered under a single address or non-existent addresses. The electoral roll must be revised and updated to wipe out these 'phantom voters'. The rakyat have a right to an electoral roll that is an accurate reflection of the voting population.

In the longer term, BERSIH 2.0 also calls for the EC to implement an automated voter registration system upon eligibility to reduce irregularities.

## ***2. Reform postal ballot***

The current postal ballot system must be reformed to ensure that all citizens of Malaysia are able to exercise their right to vote. Postal ballot should not only be open for all Malaysian citizens living abroad, but also for those within the country who cannot be physically present in their voting constituency on polling day. Police, military and civil servants too must vote normally like other voters if not on duty on polling day.

The postal ballot system must be transparent. Party agents should be allowed to monitor the entire process of postal voting.

## ***3. Use of indelible ink***

Indelible ink must be used in all elections. It is a simple, affordable and effective solution in preventing voter fraud. In 2007, the EC decided to implement the use of indelible ink. However, in the final days leading up to the 12<sup>th</sup> General Elections, the EC decided to withdraw the use of indelible ink citing legal reasons and rumours of sabotage.

BERSIH 2.0 demands for indelible ink to be used for all the upcoming elections. Failure to do so will lead to the inevitable conclusion that there is an intention to allow voter fraud.

## ***4. Minimum 21 days campaign period***

The EC should stipulate a campaign period of not less than 21 days. A longer campaign period would allow voters more time to gather information and deliberate on their choices. It will also allow candidates more time to disseminate information to rural areas. The first national elections in 1955 under the British Colonial Government had a campaign period of 42 days but the campaign period for 12<sup>th</sup> GE in 2008 was a mere 8 days.

## ***5. Free and fair access to media***

It is no secret that the Malaysian mainstream media fails to practice proportionate, fair and objective reporting for political parties of all divide. BERSIH 2.0 calls on the EC to press for all media agencies, especially state-funded media agencies such as Radio and Television Malaysia (RTM) and Bernama to allocate proportionate and objective coverage for all political parties.

## ***6. Strengthen public institutions***

Public institutions must act independently and impartially in upholding the rule of law and democracy. Public institutions such as the Judiciary, Attorney-General, Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency (MACC), Police and the EC must be reformed to act independently, uphold laws and protect human rights.

In particular, the EC must perform its constitutional duty to act independently and impartially so as to enjoy public confidence. The EC cannot continue to claim that they have no power to act, as the law provides for sufficient powers to institute a credible electoral system.

## ***7. Stop corruption***

Corruption is a disease that has infected every aspect of Malaysian life. BERSIH 2.0 and the rakyat demand for an end to all forms of corruption. Current efforts to eradicate corruption are mere tokens to appease public grouses. We demand that serious action is taken against ALL allegations of corruption, including vote buying.

## **8. Stop dirty politics**

Malaysians are tired of dirty politics that has been the main feature of the Malaysian political arena. We demand for all political parties and politicians to put an end to gutter politics. As citizens and voters, we are not interested in gutter politics; we are interested in policies that affect the nation.

Once again, BERSIH 2.0 calls on the rakyat who believe in these 8 demands to join us on 9 July to promote democracy and electoral reform. BERSIH 2.0 would like to express our deepest appreciation to the rakyat, NGOs and political parties who have expressed support for these demands. Together we can work towards building a better Malaysia.

BERSIH 2.0 welcomes UMNO Youth's intention to exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and to seek for improvement of the electoral system. As both UMNO Youth and Pakatan Rakyat component parties have made allegations of involuntary movement of voters, we call on the EC to clarify the allegations considering only the EC is capable moving voters.

BERSIH 2.0 regards UMNO Youth's move as an indication that the Perhimpunan BERSIH 2.0 is effectively promoting a vibrant democracy and affecting strong pressure on the EC for electoral reform. BERSIH 2.0 wishes success for UMNO Youth and all other parties exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly. We call on all participants for any public assemblies to be held on 9 July to ensure a peaceful experience of exercising democratic rights.

BERSIH 2.0 would like to assure the police and all quarters that the Perhimpunan BERSIH 2.0 is a peaceful citizens' movement. As we have stated previously, BERSIH 2.0 intends to work with the police to ensure the successful facilitation of the peoples' constitutional right to peaceful assembly.

## **Global Solidarity**

During the launch of the rally on 19 June 2011, BERSIH 2.0 announced that there will be rallies held in UK and Taiwan in solidarity with Perhimpunan BERSIH 2.0.

All the overseas solidarity rallies held were initiated by Malaysian citizens living abroad who supported the demands for Perhimpunan BERSIH 2.0. They personally contacted BERSIH 2.0 and expressed interest in organising a rally where they were. We regard this wide interest by the Malaysian diaspora as an indication that Malaysians from all walks of life believe in the need for electoral reform and the upholding of democracy.

We would like to announce that there are rallies confirmed in more countries:

### **1. Korea**

Date : 9 July 2011

Time : 3.00pm

Venue : Malaysian High Commission, 4-1 Hannam-dong, 140-210, Seoul

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=207786825931750>

### **2. Australia**

Date : 9 July 2011

Time : 12.00pm

Venue : Malaysian Consulate in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney (simultaneous)

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=196304237083769>

### **3. Japan**

Date: 9 July 2011

Time: 3.00pm

Venue: Tower of the Sun, Osaka

Link: <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=123767617708239>

#### **4. USA**

a. Los Angeles

Date: 9 July 2011

Time: 10.00am

Venue: Consulate General of Malaysia, 550 South Hope Street, Suite 400, Los Angeles

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=113221532103019>

b. San Francisco

Date: 9 July 2011

Time: 9.30am

Venue: Chrissy Field Picnic Area, Presidio, San Francisco

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=213741041997443>

c. New York City

Date: 9 July 2011

Time: 10.00am

Venue: Consulate General of Malaysia, 313 East 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=181904048529782>

BERSIH 2.0 calls on all Malaysian citizens living in UK, USA, Taiwan, Japan, Korea and Australia to attend the rallies if they too believe in the need for clean, free and fair elections in Malaysia. Malaysian citizens living abroad should rise to the occasion and demand for their right to vote via postal ballot in the upcoming 13<sup>th</sup> General Elections.

#### **Issued by,**

Steering Committee

Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH 2.0)

*The Steering Committee of BERSIH 2.0 comprises:*

Dato' Ambiga Sreenevasan (Chairperson), Andrew Khoo, Arumugam K., Dr Farouk Musa, Haris Ibrahim, Liau Kok Fah, Maria Chin Abdullah, Richard Y W Yeoh, Dr Toh Kin Woon, Dr Wong Chin Huat, Datuk Yeo Yang Poh, Zaid Kamaruddin, Dr Subramaniam Pillay and Arul Prakkash.

BERSIH 2.0 UK: <https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=168396233224639>

BERSIH 2.0 Taiwan: <https://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=192990560751119>

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