

PRESS STATEMENT

Malaysia: more arrests and threats against human rights defenders

Sunday 3 July 2011, by [Suaram](#) (Date first published: 2 July 2011).

PRESS STATEMENT: 2 July 2011

MORE ARRESTS AND THREATS -
THE CAMPAIGN OF INTIMIDATION AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS CONTINUES

SUARAM condemns the continuing campaign of intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders by the government of Malaysia. Since 22 June, over 100 individuals have been arrested because they have expressed their support for a mass rally on 9 July, called for by the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (Bersih 2.0).

Political Activists Rearrested

6 Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) members, Dr Jeyakumar (Member of Parliament), have been rearrested earlier today under the Emergency Ordinance (EO), which allows for 60 day detention without trial, renewable for up to 2 years at the discretion of the Home Minister.[1] The 6 were part of a group of 30 PSM activists who were remanded on 25 June for “waging war against the King”.

The PSM members had been on a road show as part of their Udahlah BN, Bersaralah (Enough BN, Retire Now) campaign, launched on 24 June. The campaign aims to expose the corruption of the BN government and also to drum up support for the Bersih 2.0 rally.

Dr Jeyakumar and the other 5 PSM activists are now being transported to police headquarters in Bukit Aman, Kuala Lumpur. The Emergency Ordinance and the Internal Security Act (ISA) have frequently been used to stifle dissent and opposition to the government.

Media Ordered To Demonise Bersih 2.0 Rally

Malaysiakini reports that the authorities have launched a media campaign to paint the rally as an “illegal gathering” in an effort to discourage citizens to participate.[2] The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) invited 22 electronic media and telecommunications operators to attend a 1 day seminar entitled ‘Content Monitoring Seminar 2011’ at its auditorium in Cyberjaya.

According to *Malaysiakini*, which obtained a copy of the invitation, the aim of the seminar is to “discuss compliance with licensing criteria and other relevant provisions”. Attendees were advised by the MCMC to refrain from referring to the rally as “Bersih rally” but as an “illegal gathering” in their media coverage and also to discourage citizens from attending. Attendees were also told to avoid using footage of police brutality and to focus instead on the inconveniences of the rally, from traffic jams to loss of business.

Najib Slams Bersih 2.0 Organisers

Prime Minister Najib Razak has personally gone all out to vilify the Bersih 2.0 organisers, especially S. Ambiga, who sits on the Bersih 2.0 steering committee. In his most recent attack, he was quoted

as saying ““Ambiga should not think herself so strong. We will not budge at all in fighting for the truth. We will keep our claws,” during a gathering in Kelantan.[3] Najib also portrayed Ambiga as a threat to Islam, working hand in hand with newly elected Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) vice president, Mohamad Sabu.

SUARAM finds these charges against the PSM activists ridiculous and indicative of a panicking government - bankrupt of ideas and clinging onto power with any and all means necessary. The political climate has gone from bad to worse, with the government clearly confusing the issue of electoral reform with some bogeyman that threatens its hold on power. The mass media and other government institutions are continually confusing civil society demands with a ‘hidden opposition agenda’.

Ministers and supposedly independent institutions such as the Election Commission are going out of their way to paint Bersih 2.0 as ‘troublemakers’. The deputy Inspector-General of Police has come out to say no more negotiations will be held with the Bersih 2.0 rally organisers. He has also not discounted the possibility of using the ISA against participants, echoing a similar statement made by Home Minister Hishamuddin Hussein. At the same time, very little has been said and done to address the core issue, which is the need for electoral reform to help provide a level playing field for all parties.

SUARAM is appalled by the arrests and the on-going crackdown on freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, a fundamental right which is guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Federal Constitution of Malaysia.

SUARAM demands that the government stop this campaign of intimidation against human rights defenders and allow them to continue to exercise their right to freedom of expression.

SUARAM also demands that the rally be allowed to continue and that the police so take all possible steps to ensure the safety of the participants.

Released By,

Hasbeemasputra Abu Bakar
Coordinator

[1] PSM 6 re-arrested under EO after release
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/168697>

[2] TV, radio told to demonise Bersih rally
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/168567>

[3] Najib tells Ambiga: We’ll keep our claws
<http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/168711>
