

Stop Harassing Activists and Human Rights Defenders

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29 April 2015

On 28th April 2015, the police arrested Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)'s Executive Director, Maria Chin Abdullah, to question her over her involvement with #KitaLawan. She had been asked earlier to present herself at the Dang Wangi Police District Headquarters for questioning. A staff member of the BERSIH 2.0 Secretariat, programme manager Mandeep Singh, was also brought in for questioning as he waited in the lobby of the police district headquarters. Both were released on police bail after about an hour.

They, along with Bayan Baru MP Sim Tze Tsin, are the latest targets of a wave of police investigations and arrests following Anwar Ibrahim's incarceration and the #KitaLawan rallies. EMPOWER is disturbed by the pattern of harassment and intimidation. It appears that the authorities are escalating their attempts at suppressing dissent and are no longer bound by even lip service to rule of law or proper procedures, given the way with which activist Hishamuddin Rais was seized by unidentified police officers and shoved into a car to be arrested.

We question the timing of the latest arrests, days before May Day rallies are to take place around the country. Are these arrests an attempt at intimidating activists and preparing the ground for further arrests after the May 1st rallies? It is outrageous the Inspector General of the Police once again resorted to the tired strategy of using examples of riots in other countries to scare Malaysians from exercising their rights, especially given that the Baltimore protests were sparked by the brutal death of a man in police custody.

We are further appalled that the Sabah police obtained a magistrate court order to ban the May Day rally in Kota Kinabalu under Section 98 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The ban prohibits 16 individuals, including the Sabah Vice-Chair of BERSIH 2.0 Jannie Lasimbang and former SUHAKAM commissioner Tan Sri Simon Sipaun, and members of the public from entering several areas in the city from 27 April to 3 May. This is ridiculously disproportionate and disregards the Court of Appeal decision on challenges to similar bans prohibiting individuals from participating in the Bersih 3.0 rally.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act and amendments to the Sedition Act have just been passed by Dewan Negara. We fear that they will be used to further strengthen the crackdowns, in addition to existing laws such as sections within the Penal Code. Now, more than ever, the country needs courageous and principled Malaysians to take a stand against the unchecked power of the State.

EMPOWER calls on the authorities, particularly the Home Ministry and the police, to respect the rights of all Malaysians under the Federal Constitution. The rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association are an integral part of any democracy. We remind the government that its role is to serve the interests of the people, not of political power.

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