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## **Malaysia: End mass repression of pro-reform activists**

Malaysian authorities are arbitrarily arresting and detaining scores of peaceful electoral reform protesters in the worst repression of free speech and freedom of assembly in recent years, Amnesty International said today.

Among those currently detained are 30 peaceful activists from the Socialist Party who were denied review of their detention today under accusations of “waging war against the king”.

Since 24 June, more than 100 activists have been arrested or questioned by police over their support of an electoral reform rally. The demonstration is being planned for 9 July by the Coalition for Fair and Free Elections, also known as Bersih 2.0, meaning ‘Clean’.

“The Malaysian authorities are muzzling calls for electoral reform by throwing peaceful protesters in jail,” said Donna Guest, Deputy Asia-Pacific Director at Amnesty International. “We have not seen such a crackdown on political activists across Malaysia in many years.”

People have been arrested for as little as wearing yellow (the colour of Bersih 2.0), are being held without charge, and face investigation for sedition and unlawful assembly. The government has also threatened to invoke the draconian Internal Security Act over the rally, allowing for indefinite detention without trial.

“Malaysia is undermining its claim to be a moderate democracy through this campaign of repression,” said Donna Guest.

Amnesty International is calling for Malaysia to immediately release all activists or charge them with a recognizably criminal offence, drop unfounded charges, and respect the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Today, the Penang High Court dismissed a review of the arbitrary detention of 30 Socialist Party activists, remanding them without charge for “waging war against the king,” which is punishable by life imprisonment. The activists, including two children, were arrested en route to a Bersih 2.0 event in Penang on 25 June.

Among these detainees is Socialist Party member of parliament Dr Jeyakumar Devaraj, who was denied access to essential heart medication for 15 hours while in detention, before being sent to a hospital for treatment.

Four more people were arrested and released today, including a Perak state assemblyman and a member of parliament, for wearing yellow.

On 29 June, police raided the office of the Bersih 2.0 Secretariat without a warrant, briefly detaining seven people and confiscating laptops, cameras, and rally materials.

The chair of the Bersih 2.0 Organising committee, prominent lawyer Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan, and Malaysian Poet Laureate A Samad Said are both being investigated by police under the Sedition Act and Police Act for organising an “unlawful assembly”.

Malaysia’s home minister, Hishammuddin Hussein, threatened on 26 June to invoke the Internal Security Act against rally organisers, on the grounds of national security.

“This repression is clearly politically motivated to intimidate people from marching for electoral reform,” said Donna Guest. “The use of repressive laws to criminalise peaceful political activism is appalling.”

Bersih 2.0 plans to hold the 9 July rally to demand a set of electoral reforms. These include fair access of all political parties to the media, reform of postal ballots and revisions of the electoral roll to address irregularities.