

Rights groups decry selective prosecution over Bersih 3.0

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Rights group Suaram today condemned what it called a “politically-motivated” decision to zoom in on three PKR politicians and charge them with attending the Bersih 3.0 protest on April 28, despite the rally also attracting some 250,000 people.

“Suaram views this selective prosecution against the three leaders as arbitrary and politically motivated and questions the credibility of the police investigation as the police force was the main violator of human rights on April 28,” Suaram executive director E Nalini said in a statement today.

PKR supremo Anwar Ibrahim, its deputy president Azmin Ali (right in photo) and party activist Badrul Hisham Shaharin were charged in a Kuala Lumpur sessions court today under the newly-passed Peaceful Assembly Act (PAA) 2012 for taking part in the protest and allegedly violating a court order barring protesters from entering Dataran Merdeka and its bordering roads.

“Suaram urges the charges against those exercising their fundamental rights to be dropped immediately,” Nalini said, adding that the organisation was opposed to the PAA as it curtails a fundamental right to street protest.

The law, which was passed as part of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak’s reform package, acknowledges a citizen’s right to assembly but only allows stationary protests. Any form of marching is banned, with the exception of religious ceremonies.

Joining in condemnation was Human Rights Watch (HRW) Asia deputy director Phil Robertson, who said: “The Malaysian authorities appear to be using what happened at the Bersih demonstration as a pretext to prosecute political opposition leaders”.

“These charges, and the actions by police at the Bersih rally, don’t inspire confidence that the Malaysian government is committed to protecting basic free expression rights,” Robertson said in a statement today.

Likewise, HRW called on the authorities to repeal the PAA, urging that the government “goes back to the drawing board”.

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