

**Bersih: Muzzling the press borders on criminal  
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The Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (Bersih) today warned the government that its draconian action to suspend The Heat newspaper was a major misstep that could incriminate the government.

Bersih, in a statement, said that the move to stop The Heat from publishing, without a fair reason, will be chalked up by the international community, alongside Malaysia's "controversial" general election last May and its lagging commitment to international human rights treaties.

The Heat's suspension has lasted two weeks pending a Home Ministry review of the news weekly's reply to a show cause letter.

Bersih (right), backing journalist group Gerakan Media Marah (Geramm)'s demands, wants the suspension to be lifted immediately.

"To silence media is always a reprehensible act and it does not garner well for the government when it proclaimed its aspirations to make Malaysia a world's best democracy.

"This action borders on criminal for the lack of respect shown to what is a cornerstone of democracy. And no self-respecting democracy would cite technicalities to justify the drastic action of suspending a media," said the statement issued by Bersih's steering committee.

Bersih noted that a free and fair access to the media was also one of its eight core demands.

Already, Malaysia's mass media has drawn flak from studies made by the University of Nottingham (Malaysia Campus) and NGO Centre for Independent Journalism for poor performance in providing accurate and balanced information to voters during the GE13, it noted.

"This failure is especially true of Bahasa Malaysia print (media), Media Prima and RTM television stations, and state-funded news agency Bernama," Bersih said.

Meanwhile Geramm will hold a rally in front of the Bar Council Building at Jalan Leboh Pasar Besar, Kuala Lumpur at 2.00 pm on Saturday, January 4.

The group, formed last month, has drawn up eight demands for a free press in the country.

Also expressing solidarity for the rally is the student group Kumpulan Aktivis Mahasiswa Independen (Kami), which urged other parties to support the protest as well.

"Kami views that the media should be free to cover any issue especially those that involve public and society's interests," it said in a statement today.

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