

Malaysia: Bicycle protesters for workers' rights defy police intimidation

Monday 8 December 2008, by [Jerit](#), [NASIR HASHIM Mohd](#) (Date first published: 7 December 2008).

December 6, 2008 — The Oppressed People's Movement (Jaring Rakyat Tertindas, Jerit) is conducting a cycling campaign throughout Malaysia to highlight demands for workers' right, which will be presented to the prime minister of Malaysia. The campaign officially began on December 3 at Wisma Darul Aman Kedah, where 50 cyclists were flagged off. They will cycle for 16 days through Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor. On December 18, they will hand a memorandum to the prime minister, at the national parliament in Kuala Lumpur.

On December 5, police stopped the Jerit cyclists from leafleting in Teluk Kumbar, Penang. The whole team was asked to go to Teluk Kumbar police station. Inspector Lokman (the police officer on duty) stopped the cyclists and warned them not to continue and threatened them to arrest them if they ignored the order. A bus and lorry containing riders' bicycles was also brought to Teluk Kumbar police station.

The police have continuously intimidated and threatened the cyclists since the campaign started on December 3. On December 4, Ruben a/l Loganathan was arrested by the police in Merbau Pulas, Kedah, for handing out leaflets containing the demands of Jerit's bicycle campaign.

The most serious police attack came on December 6, in the vicinity of Skudai in Johor. The area turned into an emergency zone, when the police units mobilised, from the Light Strike Force, the Federal Reserve Unit to traffic police, erecting road blocks which caused a massive traffic jam and massive public nuisance. This was to prevent the young and energetic young cyclists entering the area.

When the riders attempted to negotiate with the police, they were threatened with arrest for illegal assembly. At least 12 people were arrested, including Socialist Party of Malaysia (Parti Sosialis Malaysia, PSM) secretary general S.Arutchelvan, PSM treasurer A.Sivarajan, Jerit coordinator K.Simon and a 13-year-old boy. Another four Jerit and Suara Rakyat Malaysia (the human rights group Suaram) coordinators, including Ngo Jian Yee and Nyam Yee Han.

While the 16 people were held in Skudai police station, the police put the others under "house arrest" at the Suaram office. After negotiations between police and S.Arutchelvan, the police allowed everyone to leave with the condition that no cycling would continue in Skudai. Police said they would arrest any person found cycling, even after assurances that the cyclists would travel in a single line. The only assurance the police gave was that the cyclists and their lorries would be allowed to leave the district without problems.

However, police then intimidated one of the lorries and plainclothes police harassed the cyclists by snapping photographs. With less bicycles and after the bullying by the police, the Jerit southern team decided to cycle one by one, even if it meant arrest.

The team was met by the Kulai police, who allowed the cyclists to continue but warned them that they would be arrested if they committed any traffic offences. Braving the intimidation, the Jerit team cycled on but after less than 2 kilometres the police once again diverted all the cyclists to the

police station and this time said that they had been stopped because they didn't have reflectors. This further delayed the journey. The lorry carrying the remaining cyclists was again harassed.

With this, since it was getting dark, the organisers decided to move on to their next destination, Simpang Renggam. On arrival, the police were once again harassing the team. The cyclists were met by some supporters from the opposition People's Justice Party (PKR), and the team stayed in its local office.

It was a day when the police from three districts in Johor had nothing to do except monitor a group of cyclists, a day when it seems no other issues mattered in Johor.

For the cyclists, it was a frustrating day, yet their spirits remained high. By midnight, the young cyclists were putting on their reflectors and were ready to pedal the next day.

Suaram has strongly condemned the police for their ongoing intimidation and attacks on the freedom of expression, a fundamental right which is guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the federal constitution of Malaysia. Suaram demands that Malaysian government allow the cyclists to continue their ride and respect their freedom of expression as stated in the constitution.

** This article by Oppressed People's Movement (Jaring Rakyat Tertindas, Jerit) was posted on Links's website <http://links.org.au/node/781>. This article is based on information posted on the Jerit, Suaram and Aliran websites, and the blog Surind.*

PRESS STATEMENT

POLICE TOLD TO STOP HARRASING THE JERIT CYCLIST !

We condemn the recent arrest and roadblocks done by the Penang and Johor police in order to harass and delay the JERIT cycling campaign which is gaining a nationwide momentum. The 50 cyclist from the north and 32 cyclist from the south began cycling on the 3rd and 6th of December, 2008 . The JERIT cyclist are campaigning for the abolishment of ISA, Enactment of Minimum Wage, Control of prices of Goods , Decent Housing for the Poor, Stop Privatisation of water , hospitals (basic necessities) and finally for the reintroduction of Local Council Elections .

Commenting on the incident of the bicycles that were torched by certain people in Penang , the Timbalan Ketua Polis Pulau Pinang Datuk Salleh Mat Rasid called for the nationwide cycling to be called off. He said that certain people are not happy with campaigns demands thus safety of the cyclist may be compromised. We condemn the irresponsible statement by Datuk Salled Mat Rasid . Instead of assuring the democratic right for people to organise such an event peacefully, the police chief seems to justify the arson attack on the bicycles.

Is he supporting the attack ? The demands of the JERIT cyclist have been campaigned by many civil rights groups , non-governmental organisations, Bar Council , unions and others for many years .

The cyclist carry the aspirations of many Malaysians that hope to see the price of household goods to be reduced, decent affordable housing for the poor, minimum wage for the 11 million over workers and the abolishment of ISA.

It is not the police duty to evaluate the campaign's demands. They should instead investigate on the

crime that has been committed. Bicycles have been torched, property has been damaged. Instead of having roadblocks to arrest peaceful cyclist , they should spend their time solving this crime .

I have been informed that more that 200 police with Light Strike Force and trucks gathered in front the Suaram office in Skudai to prevent the cyclist from cycling on the 6th December,2008. This is a blatant abuse of police power and a waste of tax payers money! Further they were not allowed to cycle anywhere in the Skudai police district. The Kulai Police Chief, continued the harassment by issuing summons to the cyclist for not having reflectors on the bicycles ! Several police vehicles continued to pursue the cyclist . This is completely unnecessary .

While many have cried that Johor has one of the highest crime rates in the country yet the police continue to use their manpower unnecessarily on roadblocks and teams to follow the cyclist.

More that 50 organisations, individuals and State Governments have pledged support for this campaign. The Selangor, Penang , Kedah, Perak and Kelantan State governments support this campaign . The Selangor Menteri Besar, YAB Tan Sri Khalid Ibrahim officially launched this campaign on the 29th November at Stadium Melawati Shah Alam .

In Selangor the cyclist will be received and hosted by several ADUN's when the cyclist pass their respective constituencies . They will be received by YB Gan Pei Nei (ADUN Rawang) for dinner on the 15th December. I,Dr.Nasir Hashim, ADUN Kota Damansara will host the convoy on the 16th December at Kg.Baru Sg.Buloh. On the 17th December, 2008 YB Puan Haniza Mohd Talha ,Selangor State Assembly Deputy Speaker and Taman Medan ADUN will meet the JERIT cyclist for tea at her office .

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ADUN KOTA DAMANSARA

Find out more about JERIT's cycling campaign:

<http://jerit.org/>