

Swaziland frees detained opposition activists

A Swaziland High Court judge Monday freed on bail seven opposition activists arrested last month at the trial of journalists charged with publishing articles critical of King Mswati III's government.

Two senior officials and members of the banned People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO) were detained after clashing with police outside the court on 23 April.

They were charged with unlawfully soliciting support for a "terrorist" group and by chanting slogans, and wearing t-shirts and berets of the outlawed party.



Criticising Mswati and his government can be a risky business in Swaziland. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

They were also accused of inciting disaffection against the judiciary in Swaziland, the last absolute monarchy in Africa.

The group was released on 15,000 emalangeni (\$1,424) bail each. The activists had been protesting at the trial of columnist Thulani Maseko and Bheki Makhubu, editor of The Nation magazine, who are charged with contempt of court over articles critical of apparent government and court abuses.

The journalists arrested in March, released and then rearrested last month - are still in custody.

Meantime PUDEMO leader Mario Masuku was detained on Thursday after addressing a May Day rally in Mbabane.

He is being held alongside another activist Maxwell Dlamini, the general secretary of the Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO).

Their bail application will be heard on Tuesday. Political parties have been banned in the tiny mountain kingdom of Swaziland for decades and media operate under strict conditions, forbidden from criticising Mswati and his government.

Source: *Sapa-AFP*, via I-Net Bridge