

**Complaint to Pope on Najib's high-handed tactics**  
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A group of 365 Malaysian Christians, including Catholics, have signed a letter addressed to Pope Benedict XVI, complaining about Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's crackdown on the July 9 peaceful protest for electoral reforms.

They also expressed concern over the timing of Najib's visit to the Vatican, and pointed out the lack of religious freedom in Malaysia, citing the Lina Joy court case and the seizure of books on Christianity as examples.

The 365 signatories also expressed concern that Najib's visit to the Vatican at this time could be seen as securing popular support for the coming 13th general election, which must be held by mid-2013, and which could result in him clinging to power.

The letter, titled "Recent Political and Social Developments in Malaysia: Towards a more comprehensive understanding of realities in Malaysia", and published in full by the NGO Aliran, is addressed to the Pontiff, with a copy also sent to Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, who is based in Singapore.

In the letter, the group said the crackdown on Bersih 2.0's call for electoral reform saw the coalition of more than 60 NGOs suffering a clampdown by the authorities in Malaysia, which has all along been ruled by the same coalition of political parties, now led by Najib.

It said the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBHST), of which the Catholic Church of Malaysia is a part, had affirmed Bersih 2.0's right to conduct its peaceful walk for what it considered 'just demands'.

The signatories also said that Bersih 2.0 had deferred to the Agong, who intervened to head off a potential confrontation.

However, the government continued to declare the movement an illegal organisation and rejected its proposal to hold the gathering in Stadium Merdeka.

After his visit to the Vatican yesterday, Najib said Malaysia and the Vatican have agreed to establish formal diplomatic relations to promote bonds of mutual friendship and strengthen cooperation between both sides.

Najib and Pope Benedict XVI met at the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, outside the Italian capital Rome.

**Concern over rights and religious freedom**

The letter also sought to urge the Pope to critically understand the political and social realities in Malaysia, and not to hold a one-sided view.

They acknowledge the meeting would help promote Christian-Muslim dialogue, an initiative the Church undertook in 2005.

This was also something Najib has espoused upon, being a leader of moderate Muslim country, but the group noted that political leaders in Malaysia had manipulated ethno-religious sentiments all these years, and mobilised ethno-religious grounds in order to stay in power.

Describing the Najib-led BN government as "anything but moderate", they described him as someone who "does not do what he preaches" and "does not walk the talk".

They expressed concern in the government's repression of civil society groups fighting for clean and fair elections.

Explaining further on the street protests, the signatories claimed it was a result of frustrations from the inadequate electoral system that the MCCBHST took part in the peaceful Bersih 2.0 protest.

They are worried that foreign governments and leaders who host Najib could be influenced by his talk of moderation, whereas the government had used excessive force, time and time again, the most recent being the Bersih 2.0 crackdown earlier this month.

They also noted that Najib and other BN leaders had manipulated ethno-religious sentiments irresponsibly and attempted to demonise the leaders of Bersih 2.0 as anti-Islam.

The signatories also expressed their suspicious concern over Najib's political agenda in winning electoral support from Christians in Sabah and Sarawak, where they noted 43 percent of the population belonged to that faith.

The 365 also noted that with Sabah and Sarawak being considered the BN's "fixed deposits", they were worried over Najib's political agenda in the matter.

The letter said while the Malaysian constitution protected the freedom of religion, there have been curbs to this right, which is a universal fundamental human rights.

As a result of all these, they hoped and prayed the pontiff would see Najib's true intentions when dealing with the Malaysian government.