

Malaysia among the worst in civil liberty index
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The government's move to portray the country as "the world's best democracy" has hit yet another a snag - an international think-tank has ranked Malaysia 97 out of 110 countries in according personal freedom to the citizens.

The 2011 Legatum Prosperity Index, which obtained data based on studies covering 93 percent of the world population, puts Malaysia in the red, just a spot above Zimbabwe, for a low level of civil liberty.

"Despite this, in a 2010 survey, 77 percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with their level of individual freedom, placing Malaysia in the top 50 countries of the index on this variable.

"However, this level of freedom does not create a tolerant society.

"A low number - 22 percent of Malaysians - think their country is a good place for immigrants, and only 66 percent think it is a good place for ethnic and racial minorities, placing Malaysia 109th and 66th, respectively, on these variables," says the London-based organisation's report.

The personal freedom sub-index categorises a country's performance in two areas - individual freedom and social tolerance.

Less than half the population feels safe

Malaysia also scored poorly in the social capital sub-index, which indicates that most citizens feel they are unable to trust or rely on others.

With the country taking the 75th spot in this area, the report says the ranking showed a lack of social cohesion, since a mere 14 percent of Malaysians believe that others can be trusted.

Similarly, it finds that less than half of the population feel safe and secure - a 53rd spot ranking - despite rare scenes of political violence and civil conflicts in the country.

This, the report says, could be the result of "demographic instability" that could have resulted from "border disputes, ownership or occupancy of land, access to transportation outlets, control of religious or historical sites or proximity to environmental hazards".

"Theft affected 10 percent of citizens, but this is below the global average, making Malaysians the 27th least likely population to suffer from theft.

"Nonetheless, only 42 percent feel safe walking alone at night, placing the country 95th on this variable, and an above average number feel unsafe expressing their political opinions," it says.

Prosperous on the economic front

However, Malaysia fared better in economics, at the 17th spot, trailing Singapore and Norway that took the first and second places.

Malaysia performs well on macroeconomic indicators.

The country has an inflation rate of 0.58 percent, and a high gross domestic savings rate of 36 percent, indicating a stable and flourishing economy, with the country placing 17th and 13th, respectively, on these variables.

factory workers sweatshops 090107 clothing"Malaysia's GDP growth per capita increased by an average

of 2.3 percent per year from 2005 to 2009, indicating steady growth and contributing to positive subjective assessments of the economy.

"Approximately 71 percent of Malaysians are satisfied with their standard of living, 53 percent believe the job market is positive, and an above average number are optimistic about Malaysia's economy," it states.

But despite this positive ranking in the economy sub-sector, the country scored 35th in the governance sub-sector.

"Malaysia is placed 72nd, globally, for the strength of its democracy. The bureaucracy is the 28th most efficient in the world; however, following a period of significant political unrest in 2008, the political system underwent substantial change," the report says.

On entrepreneurship and opportunities, Malaysia came in 36th, with the report saying the country's ICT facilities encourage commercial activity.

"Although only one percent of the GDP is spent on R&D (research and development), Malaysia maintains a very high level of ICT exports, placing it third on this variable, both globally and regionally," it says.

Malaysian workers relatively poorly educated

On the education and health indicators, Malaysia is ranked 46.

On education, the finding says limited enrolment at higher education levels meant that Malaysian workers were relatively poorly educated.

Although, there is a high level of enrolment at the primary level, the report says gross enrolment falls to a below average 68 percent at the secondary level and 36 percent at the tertiary level.

"The workforce as a whole is at an average level by global standards with just over two years of secondary education and one year of tertiary education.

"Nonetheless, Malaysians are very satisfied with their national educational system: 90 percent of the population is happy with local educational facilities and 94 percent believe that children have the opportunity to learn and grow every day, placing Malaysia in the top 10 countries in the world on both variables."

On health, the report assigns the above-average ranking to low health expenditure.

"However, per capita health expenditure stands at only US\$620, which places the country 59th on this variable."

Overall, Malaysia ranks at 43 on the Legatum Prosperity Index.

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