

**Suaram: 4 out of 10 for Najib on human rights**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Disember 8 ,2011**  
**by S Pathmawathy**

The government has been fiercely criticised for violating human rights in its crackdown on several civil society movements this year.

Human rights organisation Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram) director Kua Kia Soong (right) said today the government under Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak had failed in upholding the rights of the people.

"I would rank the government four out 10 because (despite) promising to grant an expansion of civil liberty, there are still such things as detention without trial," said Kua.

He was speaking to reporters at the launch of Suaram's 2011 Civil and Political Rights Report overview in Kuala Lumpur today.

With the general election speculated for next year, Kua foresees further stifling of rights as the government has yet to tackle issues of polls fraud and corruption.

"We expect to see all kinds of corruption, vote-buying for one. We know that the government has plans to retain detention without trial with its to-be-announced anti-terrorism laws.

"And in rushing to pass the Peaceful Assembly Act, you can expect more police harassment," said Kua.

In the overview today, Suaram coordinator Wong Kar Fai said the civil liberties reforms announced by Najib on the eve of Malaysia Day on Sept 15 "turned out to be retrogressive".

Wong attributed the findings to the recent arrest of 50 people under the to-be repealed Internal Security Act (ISA) and about 1,000 detainees still under the Emergency Ordinance (EO) and Dangerous Drugs Act (DDA).

The recurring incidents of police shooting and the continuous usage of death penalties were also cited.

The core reasons, however, were focussed on the government's clampdown on Bersih 2.0's electoral reform rally, HRP's anti-racism rally and Seksualiti Merdeka.

Largest number of arrests during a peaceful assembly

"A total of 1,667 persons (on July 9) were arrested that day, perhaps the largest number of arrests in Malaysia during a single peaceful assembly. There was one death reported when Baharudin Ahmad died allegedly due to asphyxiation by teargas," said Wong.

"In February, 109 people were arrested in an anti-racism rally organised by the Human Rights Party to protest against the controversial Interlok novel which contained racial slurs.

"Police arbitrarily arrested persons they suspected to be HRP supporters, especially Indians walking on the streets," he said.

Wong's presentation also shed light on the restrictions on freedom of religion, freedom of expression and freedom of information as well as freedom of association.

Referring to the problem that rose from the stamping of 5,100 Malay-language bibles with "for Christians only" on the inside covers ranked Malaysia in fifth place for government-led restrictions by a Washington-based think-tank, he said.

The suspension of constitutional law professor Abdul Aziz Bari by Universiti Islam Antarabangsa and the ban on and derogatory remarks made against Seksualiti Merdeka, an event held to increase awareness on the plight of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people, were also cited as significant cause behind the erosion in human rights.

“Malaysia’s human rights record for 2011 puts into question Najib’s promise of reforms including the repeal of detention without trial laws, the Police Act and greater freedom of assembly.

“The recent speedily-passed Peaceful Assembly Act has deprived Malaysians of their freedom to assemble peacefully as enshrined in Article 10 of the federal constitution,” said Wong.

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