

**PKR: Contempt threat by chief judge undemocratic**  
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Chief Justice Arifin Zakaria's public threat to cite for contempt those critical of the judiciary is undemocratic and worsens public's confidence in the country's judicial system, PKR vice-president N Surendran says.

NONE "The power of contempt cannot be used as the basis to issue general warnings to the citizenry.

"It is unprecedented for a sitting chief justice in a Commonwealth nation to issue threats of this nature," Surendran said in a statement today.

He said Arifin's statement reported by Utusan Malaysia yesterday was "surprising, inappropriate and undemocratic".

Arifin was quoted as warning that judges would not hesitate to cite those who malign the judiciary for contempt.

Surendran said the statement only worsened an already dismal level of public confidence in the judiciary, which he said was at "its lowest since independence".

'Judiciary at fault'

The human rights lawyer said the CJ should address the "very real problems facing the judiciary and to take urgent steps to re-build public confidence" instead of burying his head in the sand.

"Since the late Sixties, the judiciary has consistently failed to uphold the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights of the rakyat.

"The judiciary has failed to perform its role as the bulwark of the rakyat's liberties against executive interference," Surendran said.

"But like an ostrich with its head buried in the sand, the CJ is pretending that there is nothing wrong."

He blamed the ruling government for undermining the independence of the judiciary, citing the "notorious sacking of Tun Salleh Abbas, the unjust Anwar Ibrahim sodomy trials and the unresolved Lingam tape scandal" as well as the incident over the "shoe-throwing imam".

"The judiciary itself must bear much of the blame (for public criticism)," Surendran said.

On March 8 Kuala Lumpur-based imam Hoslan Hussain was sentenced to a year's imprisonment for contempt for throwing his shoes at the three judges on the Federal Court bench in protest against what he called their "unjust ruling".



