

Envoy expresses concern over religious freedom
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British High Commissioner to Malaysia Simon Featherstone ended his service at the Kuala Lumpur mission yesterday by expressing concern over religious freedom in Malaysia.

Writing as a guest blogger on a consulate officer's website, Featherstone called for respect for religious freedom, more inclusive politics and the repeal of outdated laws.

"I hope the coming months will see a more inclusive democratic process and that the repeal of colonial era legislation like the Sedition Act will get back on track," Featherstone (centre) said, naming the 13th general election as the "defining political event" during his three-and-a-half-year posting.

"I also hope that religious freedom in Malaysia continues to be respected. Recent incidents have damaged Malaysia's reputation as a tolerant and diverse nation," he wrote.

Although he did not specify these "recent incidents", prominent freedom of religion-related cases that have affected the country include the ban on the use of the word 'Allah' by non-Muslims, resulting in seizure of copies of the Bible in Selangor.

'Saddest incident'

Featherstone also lauded Malaysia for its contributions to regional peace by brokering the Mindanao Peace Process, and expressed sympathy with the MH370 tragedy.

He said that the disappearance of the Malaysia Airlines (MAS) plane was the "saddest" incident during his time in Malaysia.

"I cannot imagine what the families of those on board must be going through on a daily basis. My heart goes out to them.

"I have been proud of the role that the UK has played in the search effort and we will continue to offer whatever support we can. I hope that the aircraft is found soon so that the families may have some closure."

Featherstone also named the much talked about visit of British royal couple - the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge - to Malaysia in 2012 as a "personal highlight".

"(It) has been a huge privilege to serve as British High Commissioner to Malaysia.

"I will miss the friends I have made here, the delicious food, the chance to watch so much

live English Premier League football and the beauty and diversity of this unique country," he said.

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