

PKR: Sedition arrests affecting Malaysia's image
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Sarawak PKR has warned the government its usage of the Sedition Act to arrest politicians, lawyers, academicians, journalists and social activists who do not agree with the government will worsen Malaysia's image as a moderate Muslim-majority country.

"It will further worsen our reputation and image because the issue of the use of the word 'Allah' also has a direct impact on the right of expression," Sarawak PKR chief Baru Bian said today.

The Ba'Kelalan assemblyperson was commenting on a statement by the Office of the United High Commission for Human Rights, which expressed concern over what it sees as a rise in the persecution of peaceful expressions in Malaysia.

UN Human Rights commissioner Rupert Colville described the arbitrary Sedition Act arrests as persecutions to silence 'critical' voices.

"We call on the Malaysian government to quickly initiate a promised review of the Act and to repeal or amend it in line with its international human rights obligations."

As such, Colville (left) urged the government to halt actions under the Sedition Act and to drop all charges preferred, pointing out that among the 19 who have come under the dragnet since August are civil society members and religious leaders.

The arrest of Malaysiakini journalist Susan Loone for sedition was of particular concern, he said.

Asked to comment on Colville's statement, Baru said he agreed that the arrests of Malaysians for sedition and the ban on the use of word 'Allah' by non-Muslims are definitely affecting the country's reputation in the international arena.

"Such arrests can also affect foreign direct investment in Malaysia," he said.

Commenting on the same issue, Baru's colleague See Chee How, who is state PKR vice-chairperson, said the Malaysian government, in the eyes of the international community, is on the verge of bankruptcy in terms of moral authority to rule this country.

"The existence and abuse of the Sedition Act to prosecute political dissents and critics is putting the country to shame," See said.

