

No selective prosecution, Ottawa cautions Najib
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Ottawa has reminded Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak that the enforcement of a country's laws should not run contrary to democratic principles.

In a statement today, Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird said the government should not use the Sedition Act to suppress criticisms against it.

"Following the recent announcement that the Sedition Act will be strengthened rather than repealed, Canada urges the government of Malaysia to ensure that enforcement of its laws does not run contrary to its democratic principles by selectively prosecuting individuals for expressing views critical of the government or its policies," he added.

Baird pointed out that "freedom of expression is essential to any democracy" and expected the Malaysian government to "progress on this issue".

Touching on the long-standing relationship that Canada has with Malaysia, he reiterated that Ottawa would continue to work together with authorities here in the "pursuit of freedom, prosperity and security."

Canada has now joined the bandwagon of international observers who have condemned the selective use of the Sedition Act.

Previously, United States Vice-President Joe Biden and US Ambassador to Malaysia Joseph Yun also criticised the draconian legislation.

In 2012, Najib had pledged that the Sedition Act would be repealed and replaced with a new law that would be known as the National Harmony Act.

However, the prime minister made a turnaround at the last Umno general assembly, where he said the Sedition Act would be maintained to deal with sensitive issues pertaining to race and religion.

Many believed that Najib was pressured by the right-wing elements in his party.

Since then, the Act has been repeatedly invoked against opposition politicians and civil society leaders.

The latest was the arrest of Lawyers for Liberty (LFL) executive director Eric Paulsen over his tweet accusing the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (Jakim) of spreading extremism in Friday sermons.

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