

Najib puts politics over human rights, says NGO
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has been criticised for his willingness to “put politics over human rights” in his about-turn on revoking the Sedition Act.

Human Rights Watch Asia deputy director Phil Robertson was commenting on the release of its 656-page world report on human rights practices in over 90 countries.

“Prime Minister Najib’s shameful reversal of his pledge to end sedition shows his willingness to put politics over human rights.

“Malaysia’s human rights are in a downward spiral because the government evidently believes that continued rule depends on suppressing speech, harassing opposition groups and targeting prominent figures with legal action,” he said in a statement today.

Meanwhile, the report states how dozens of people had been arrested under the Sedition Act for making remarks critical of the government, political leaders, the ruling party, and Malaysia’s rulers. At least 20 people were charged, including four senior opposition MPs.

Najib had, in 2012, announced that the Sedition Act will be repealed and replaced with the National Harmony Act.

Nevertheless, during the recent Umno general assembly, Najib made an infamous U-turn by announcing that the Sedition Act will instead be strengthened.

The report further reveals that Malaysiakini had been a frequent government target.

Despite an Oct 2013 Court of Appeal decision that a license to publish is a constitutional right, the Home Ministry refuses to issue a license to the news portal.

Najib, in May last year, sued the portal for defamation based on readers’ comments.

Meanwhile, the report also states how the Malaysian authorities had continued their “politically motivated” prosecution of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim for sodomy.

“The government’s repeated prosecutions of Anwar under the sodomy law, highlights the dangers this discriminatory law poses so long as it remains on the books,” Robertson (left) said.

In March last year, the Court of Appeal overturned a 2012 not guilty verdict against Anwar on sodomy charges, and sentenced him to a five-year prison term.

On Feb 10, the Federal Court will deliver its verdict on Anwar's final appeal against his

sodomy conviction and five-year jail sentence.

Should it uphold his conviction, Anwar faces imprisonment and the loss of his seat in Parliament.

Meanwhile, the report also states that the police had continued to abuse rights of detainees in police custody with impunity.

“There were at least 10 new cases of custodial deaths in 2014, and police used excessive force during apprehension of suspects,” it said.

It also claimed that the government continues to vilify lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

Commenting further on the report findings, Robertson said the Malaysian government had not been addressing the country’s serious rights problems.

“The government will need to reverse course on rights in 2015 if it wants to truly bolster its international standing,” he said.

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