

## **Amid crackdown, ex-PM fears police state**

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Amid a police crackdown on criticism and dissent, Dr Mahathir Mohamad has raised concerns about Malaysia turning into a police state.

In the latest YouTube video uploaded by bloggers who interviewed the former prime minister last Friday, Mahathir said the arrests of journalists from The Edge Media Group was "not the right way to use power".

The 40-second video was trimmed without a clear start and ending, but Mahathir appeared to be referring to Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

"The reporters from The Edge were arrested for supposedly saying seditious (things), I don't think that is the right way to use power.

"Of course he (Najib) will say it is not him, it's the police.

"But we don't want a police state where police come and arrest people, even the magistrate did not want to grant (remand)," said Mahathir.

On March 30, three editors from news portal The Malaysian Insider (TMI), under The Edge Media Group, were arrested over a report claiming the conference of rulers had rejected hudud.

They were held overnight but police failed to obtain a remand order against them and were forced to free the three.

TMI executive director Jahabar Sadiq and The Edge publisher Ho Kay Tat were also arrested the following day.

The news portal has since apologised for the report, but pointed out that the matter was likewise carried by government-linked mainstream media, which faced no action.

Police have aggressively used the Sedition Act against government critics after Najib reneged on his promise to abolish the colonial-era law.

Last week, Najib drifted farther from his pledge for reforms as the penalty for sedition was increased from a maximum of three years imprisonment to 20 years.

Even though criticism of government and the judiciary is no longer considered seditious, sedition on grounds of religion was introduced and the definition of sedition was also expanded.

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