

PM gets shelling for crackdown
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Civil groups, rights activists and political leaders - both local and international - today condemned Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi for detaining without trial three people in a shock crackdown that critics believe is aimed at prolonging his stay in power.

"The Malaysian government apparently thinks it can only maintain power by jailing journalists and opposition politicians," said Elaine Pearson, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch.

"Such tactics have no place in a modern democracy. The government should free these three people at once or risk irreparable harm to Malaysia's already fragile reputation," she added.

abdullah ahmad badawi pak lah pc 050908 04The 68-year old Abdullah has been under siege since leading his ruling Barisan Nasional coalition to its worst performance in 51 years during national polls in held March.

His failure to nip in the bud a string of controversies including rising outbreaks of racial intolerance has also undermined his political standing.

Abdullah, a career civil servant, is now facing calls from within his own Umno party to step down as well as a looming challenge from opposition icon Anwar Ibrahim, who has promised voters to form a new government by Sept 16.

Crackdown

Last night, the police arrested opposition politician Teresa Kok, prominent blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin and journalist Tan Hoon Cheng under the country's tough Internal Security Act for allegedly being threats to security, peace and public order.

"The arrests of the three individuals under the draconian law at a time when Malaysians have become more mature politically and less inclined to be baited by racial politics will no doubt further erode the legitimacy of and support for the ruling party, perhaps irrevocably," the Muslim Professionals Forum said in a statement.

isa 3 teresa raja petra tan hoon cheng"These people have been arrested on matters that are already in the public domain, and we are incredulous as to how any of these matters justifies the use of the ISA," said Malaysia's Bar Council.

"We have sufficient provisions in the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code that allow for police investigation in these instances. We have said it again and we will say it again - if there are perceived offences, charge these people and give them their fundamental right to defend themselves," the council added.

The United States too has summoned Malaysia's top envoy in Washington to protest the crackdown.

"Peaceful expression of political opinions is a fundamental right and critical to a democracy,"

a State Department official was quoted as saying by AFP.

"The United States believes that the Malaysian government should provide due process and treatment consistent with Malaysian law and international standards. We expect that democratic countries that purport to advocate free expression of political views will not curtail such freedom," the official said.

Journalist may be released

Chinese Malaysians, already angered over last week's incident wherein Umno chieftain Ahmad Ismail had launched a verbal attack against the community, are shocked by the latest incident.

They are demanding answers as to why Tan, the journalist who reported Ahmad's racist comments was jailed, while Ahmad was merely suspended from his party.

chua jui meng 010605"Why then is this poor 33-year-old girl being detained under the most draconian of laws in Malaysia where she cannot even claim trial? It is blatant discrimination that the man who made seditious statements still walks free while the person who reported him is disproportionately and inappropriately punished," said MCA leader Chua Jui Meng.

"Rather than closing an embarrassing chapter we have now exacerbated the situation," Chua added.

samy vellu 010307"I have spoken to the prime minister on the phone today urging him to request Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar to immediately release her," said S Samy Vellu, MIC president.

Meanwhile, the home minister told the Star Online that Tan may be released as early as today. However, he made no mention of Kok and Raja Petra.

Malaysia's infamous security law - the Internal Security Act - provides for renewable two-year periods of detention without trial and is normally used against suspected terrorists.

Unfortunately, it has also been used to lock up opponents of the government, and just last year, five Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) leaders were detained after mounting a mammoth rally in the streets of Kuala Lumpur on Nov 25.

Hindraf, which represents Indian Malaysians was protesting against the shrinking of the community's rights and slice of the economic pie.

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