

Najib advises beer-drinking model to appeal
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Prime Minister Najib Razak today urged a Muslim model who faces being caned for drinking beer to appeal the sentence and not be "so willing" to accept her fate.

Kartika Sari Dewi Shukarno, 32, won a surprise reprieve on Monday when religious officials who took her into custody ahead of the caning abruptly released her and delayed the punishment until after the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

She was sentenced by a religious court last month to six strokes.

If the punishment is carried out she would be the first woman to face caning under Islamic law in Malaysia, a moderate Muslim-majority country.

The mother-of-two has stared down religious authorities by saying she is ready to be caned, refusing to appeal against her sentence, and challenging them to cane her in public.

'She should not be so willing'

But Najib said that while he would not interfere with the syariah courts, which operate alongside the civil court system in Malaysia, there were still avenues for Kartika to appeal.

"I believe the authorities concerned are sensitive on this matter and realise the implications of this case," he told a press conference.

"I feel the person concerned should appeal to the state authorities and not be so willing to accept the punishment," he said.

And in another function later in the day, Najib said the implementation of syariah law on women should be merciful.

He added that physical punishment should only be a last resort.

Human rights group Amnesty International has urged Malaysia to abolish the "cruel and degrading punishment" and critics have said the case threatens to damage Malaysia's international standing.