

 KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia ranked first among 19 upper-middle income countries in terms of safety but came in second to last globally on its human rights record.

◆ The country is safe, ranking top among 19 income peers and on par with (high income) countries such as France and Belgium.

◆ However, abuses by the police still occur, ◆ the World Justice Project's (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2011 report, released on Monday, stated.

Out of 66 countries, Malaysia at 12th place also beat the United States (13th) and Britain (14th) in terms of safety.

◆ The index measures how laws are implemented and enforced in practice and affect people's lives, ◆ said WJP Rule of Law Index director Juan Botero.

WJP executive director Hongxia Liu said achieving the rule of law was a constant challenge and ◆ a work in progress ◆ in all countries, adding: ◆ The Index is not designed to shame or blame but to provide useful reference points for countries in the same regions with comparable legal cultures and similar income levels. The sub-factors in each factor in the Index was scored between 0' (lowest) and 1' (highest).

◆ The Order and Security factor was based on the sub-factors of how civil conflict is effectively limited, absence of crime and people not resorting to violence to redress grievances Malaysia scored 1 for the first and over 0.5 for the latter two.

◆ The Fundamental Rights factor was based on the sub-factors of equal treatment and absence of discrimination, right to life and security, due process, fundamental labour rights, freedom of opinion/expression/belief/religion, arbitrary interference of privacy, and freedom of assembly and association.

◆ Malaysia scored slightly more than 0.5 for the first four but well below 0.5 for the freedoms and privacy sub-factors.

◆ The report stated that Malaysia presented a ◆ contrasting view as with many other countries in the East Asia and Pacific region.

◆ The Government was ◆ reasonably accountable ◆ in comparison with its income peers ◆ although corruption, political interference, and impunity still exist ◆, it added.

◆ While the judiciary and police/military scored above 0.5 for absence of corruption, the Executive scraped it at 0.5.

◆ The other countries in the upper-middle income group include Albania, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Iran, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Turkey and Venezuela.

◆ Noting that the efficiency and transparency of government agencies could still improve, the report recommended that efforts be made in the area of access to civil justice where Malaysia ranked 44th globally and 14th in the upper-middle income group