

Ban handphones, PDAs for specific occasions
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The government should ban the use of mobile phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs) for specific occasions only, said Congress of Unions of Employees in the Public and Civil Services (Cuepacs) advisor N Siva Subramaniam.

Contacted on Tuesday, he disagreed with the need for a blanket ban.

"It is only necessary to ban mobile phones and PDAs in occasions like cabinet meetings or important salary negotiations between government agencies and ministries," he said.

Siva was asked to comment on the move to ban such gadgets in government offices in order to prevent spying.

He said the ban was necessary in cabinet meetings and salary negotiation meetings because confidential information will be discussed.

"If someone leaks the information to a third party such as the media, then it will be a misuse of mobile phones and PDAs. Therefore it should be banned (during specific meetings)," he added.

He said the risk is doubled if the irresponsible person possesses a mobile phone or PDA with camera or video camera capabilities.

'Illogical and unreasonable'

However, he pointed out that a blanket ban covering all government agencies will only cause inconvenience to the public.

Siva said it would be "illogical and unreasonable" for government agencies such as post offices, local councils and ministries to impose such a ban.

"It will not only be inconvenient to the public, but what if there is an emergency, they cannot make a call because they are in a government office," he added.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission declined to comment, saying that it would be inappropriate as it was a government agency as well.

On Monday, Public Services Department Chief Security Officer Johari Jamaluddin said no breaches had yet been detected but the prevalence of electronic devices raised fears of information leaks.

"We had never felt the need to come up with such a ban before because the use of camera handphones and other electronic devices was not rampant.

"Now, everyone seems to have them. It is a bit inconvenient but for the sake of the country's security, everyone has to play their role," he added.

The government has also introduced electronic jamming devices in "information security zones" where official matters are discussed.

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