

PM bows to pressure, wants to 'discuss' Section 114A
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has instructed cabinet to "discuss" about the controversial amendments to the Evidence Act 1950 following a major online protest, dubbed as Internet Blackout Day.

Najib said this in a tweet from Saudi Arabia, where he is attending the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit, that the people must come first.

"I have asked cabinet to discuss Section 114A of the Evidence Act 1950. Whatever we do we must put people first," wrote Najib.

Najib's tweet comes almost after dozens of websites adopted the Centre of Independent Journalism's campaign against Section 114A, which they argued would put innocent Internet users at risk of persecution.

The campaign is heavily discussed on social networking websites and has attracted wide coverage from international news organisations.

Earlier today, some BN leaders such as MCA vice-president Gan Ping Sieu has urged the federal government to review Section 114A of because it will cause hardship to innocent Internet users.

In a press release today, Gan described the law as imposing a "presumption of guilt" among Internet users and service providers who may be victims while the real offenders are at large.

"As an alternative and perhaps a compromise to meet the needs to tackle Internet abuse, a legal duty should be imposed instead so that any innocent agents or Internet service providers must provide full cooperation to enforcement agencies to assist investigations into these cases of Internet abuse," said Gan.

Gan is among a small group of BN leaders to have expressed concern over the law. Others include Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin and Saifuddin Abdullah.

In a tweet this evening, Khairy stated he will be meeting de facto law minister Nazri Abdul Aziz on Thursday to ask the government to have another look at Section 114A.

"We must not be oblivious to the voices of many Msians," he tweeted.

The trio, who are frequent Twitter users, appeared to have slowed down with their tweets today as thousands of Malaysian Internet users observe Internet Blackout Day, a campaign initiated by the Centre of Independent Journalism against Section 114A.

The campaign called on Malaysians to attach a black pop-up on their websites to educate visitors about the law and register their protest. Some Twitter and Facebook users have chosen to refrain from posting today, as their sign of protest.

Punishing the innocent

Gan said the new law can cause problems for innocent Internet users if there are subject to hacking or identity theft while other service providers such as cyber cafes, coffee shops and shopping malls may be affected by the law as well.

"For example, if an irresponsible individual comes to my Facebook page and post defamatory messages or hatred remarks, but I wasn't able to keep track of all the comments on my page, am I to be held responsible in events of such comments are quoted even though it did not originate from me?" he asked.

"To extrapolate such a scenario even further, private companies providing free Internet services such as shopping malls or even Federal and state governments intending to provide free WiFi services to the public could be a victim of this law.

"It is expected that once free services are provided, there will be irresponsible individuals or groups who will take advantage of such a platform to abuse these services," he said.

However, Gan said that it was necessary for the government to come up with proper measures to combat hate speech on the Internet as users are anonymous.

"However, at this point in time, Section 114A of the Evidence Act does not seem to be able to fulfill this purpose completely," he said.

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