

PM says 114A 'modern, forward-looking' legislation

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By Aidila Razak

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has defended the controversial amendment to the Evidence Act 1950 as "modern and forward-looking".

Speaking at the National Press Club Award, Najib said that this was because the amendment protects people from cyber crimes.

"Freedom co-exists with respect. That was why there was an amendment to the Evidence Act.

"It has not been explained enough. It is aimed at protecting people from Internet-based crime like cyberbullying," he said.

Speaking to a room full of reporters, he said that while professional journalists are bound by code of ethics and to report "responsibly", those online may not be so accountable.

"Online users can deploy guerilla tactics using slander and harassment, which can be used under the cloak of anonymity," he said.

The amendment, section 114A of the Act, had received severe criticism from netizens and civil society, who argue that it shifts burden of proof to the accused.

Among the critics are Barisan National MPs Saifuddin Abdullah and Khairy Jamaluddin and senator Gan Peng Sieu.

The prime minister, who was overseas during the height of the criticism last month, had instructed the cabinet to discuss the matter following the criticism.

However, the government decided not to review the law.

Najib also presented the awards to the following winners:

- Journalist of the year: Frankie D'Cruz (The Malay Mail)
- Photographer of the year: Glenn Guan (The Star)
- Media Legend Award: Abdullah Mohammad
- Lifetime Achievement Award: Syed Nadzri Syed Harun
- Young journalist of the year: Alyaa Abdul Aziz Alhadjri (The Sun)
- Social media personality: Dave Avran

- Broadcast journalist award: Selina Kong (ntv7)
- Best reporter (English): Audrey Edwards (The Star)
- Best reporter (Malay-language): Wan Norhayati Wan Alias (Utusan Malaysia)
- Best reporter (Chinese-language): Tay Tian Yian (Sin Chew Daily)
- Best reporter (Tamil): Vivekanandan (Nam Naadu)
- Best reporter (Sabah): Mary Chin (Daily Express)
- Best reporter (Sarawak): Steven Tian (The Star, Sarawak edition)
- 1Malaysian of the year: Pandalela Rinong Pamg

The best media organisation (community service) award was shared by The Star, New Straits Times, The Malay Mail, Nanyang Siang Pau, Astro Radio, TV3 and Berita Harian.

The winners walked away with cash prizes, a plaque and flight tickets.

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