

Najib backpedals on sedition repeal pledge?

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Amid mounting pressure from Umno grassroots, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak has indicated that he may backpedal on his pledge to abolish the Sedition Act.

In his monthly briefing to civil servants at the Prime Minister's Department, Najib said whether the Sedition Act would be repealed or not would be "discussed".

"In the polemic on whether we want the (new) Harmony Act or if we want to retain the Sedition Act, we must do so in a rational process.

"In this regard, we will hold discussions with all stakeholders," he said.

Najib assured that the government would not take any action that would result in disharmony in the country.

The prime minister spotlighted the Malay lobbyists as being particularly "vocal" about the issue.

"We must understand why they voice an issue that is dear to their heart," he said.

He cited the central arguments of protecting the Malays and the royalty as enshrined in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution, "that must be understood" when approaching the subject.

Many opponents to the law including the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) have criticised Najib for continuing to use the draconian colonial-era law despite the pre-election promise.

Several politicians, social activists as well as an academic were charged with sedition in recent months while a journalist and preacher have also been probed under the colonial era law.

While the prime minister recently said plans to repeal the Act is still underway, pro-government lobbyists like Perkasa have been increasing pressure on Najib to maintain the law.

Dr M: Najib 'soft'

Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad (left), who during his time as prime minister used the Sedition Act to imprison several opposition politicians including current Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng, had also slammed Najib as "soft".

Yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin also said that the repeal of the Sedition Act was not final even though Najib had promised to do away with the law in 2012.

Meanwhile, PKR deputy president Azmin Ali warned that breaking a leaders' promise to the people is a serious wrong in Islam.

"Muhyiddin's claim that there is no decision to repeal comes just two days after Najib's latest promise to repeal on Sept 5.

"Who is the prime minister of Malaysia? Najib or Muhyiddin?" he said in a statement today.

Azmin urged Najib to follow through with his promise to abolish the Sedition Act and cease the recent series of charges against politicians and activists under the British era law.

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