

We'll back you against extremists, lawyers tell PM
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The Malaysian Bar has urged Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak not to bow to extremists and press on with his political transformation programme.

It said that contrary to its purported purpose, the Sedition Act 1948 is what encourages extremists by clamping down on the freedom of expression.

"There are extremists and irresponsible elements in our society. They spread misinformation, use intimidation and divisiveness. They exploit fear and insecurities.

"They seek to drive a wedge among Malaysians and polarise us. Do not allow them to succeed," it said in its memorandum calling for the repeal of the Sedition Act.

It told Najib to continue with his political transformation programme, including his pledge to repeal the Act.

"The Malaysian Bar therefore urges the prime minister and the Malaysian government to continue to commit to and promote the building of a fair, just, harmonious, unified, moderate and progressive Malaysia, and reject all forms of bigotry, racist and religious extremism; to stay the course and to abide by its original and oft-repeated public pledge and promise to repeal the Sedition Act 1948," it said.

The memorandum was handed over to the government by a delegation led by Bar Council president Christopher Leong (right), during the 'Walk for Peace and Freedom' protest.

It was received by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mah Siew Keong on Najib's behalf. The seven-page document can be viewed at the Bar Council website.

The Malaysian Bar, which a statutory body representing all lawyers in Peninsular Malaysia, said the Sedition Act had prevented important issues from being discussed and allowed it to fester, and impeded the development of a more mature, considerate, and accepting Malaysian psyche.

"This legislation serves to perpetuate and entrench the racial, religious and other fault lines in our nation.

"It thus undermines and is counter-productive to efforts to build lasting peace and harmony, strong bonds of unity and real mutual respect in Malaysia," it said.

Race, religion and royalty

Earlier today, after submitting the memorandum, Leong also told reporters that any law replacing the Sedition Act should be limited to criminalising the incitement and acts of religious and racial violence, and bringing the royal institution into contempt.

"We know that in multi-racial, multi-religious Malaysia there are some fault lines, but those fault lines must not be managed by vague and oppressive laws like the Sedition Act," he said.

He said any law that replaces the Act needs to encourage greater interaction and dialogue among Malaysians, and should in turn ensure peace, unity and harmony.

The law, Leong pointed out, should ensure that people would not be intimidated or threatened while participating in discourse.

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