

## **Rais: Doctored Najib photo a crime against society**

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A former minister has admonished those responsible for doctoring a photograph, where Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak was portrayed as a Hindu priest.

According to Rais Yatim, such actions reflect a "society which is sick in terms of its thinking".

To counter this, the former information, communications and culture minister said ethics must be taught in schools and other institutions of learning.

He also pointed out that all religions stressed on the importance of ethical behaviour.

Rais is currently president of Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) and special adviser to the government on socio-cultural matters, with ministerial status.

Terming the doctored photograph as a "crime against society", Rais said Najib could initiate legal action against those behind it in terms of filing a defamation suit.

However, the veteran politician is confident that the prime minister would not resort to such measures and would instead let the people judge it for themselves.

"But in the long term, we need to teach our society to respect others," he said today.

Yesterday, the NGO Melayu Martabat Jalinan Muhibbah Malaysia (MJMM) lodged a police report against the Facebook page 'Bolehland' for publishing the edited picture of Najib.

The picture shows Najib's face superimposed over that of a Hindu priest.

'Little room for legal action'

Rais said that using Malaysia's "backward" laws, there is little room for victims of such publications to take legal action, even within the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission Act.

Although legal avenues are still open, he said the authorities and the attorney-general would have to study the matter carefully before taking action.

On another matter, Rais said Section 3 and Section 4 of the Sedition Act should be retained. The two sections defines what is a seditious tendency, and spells out the penalty.

Critics of the draconian law had argued that the law defines sedition too vaguely and leaves

it susceptible to abuse, while proponents of the law claimed that it is needed to maintain racial harmony and protect institutions such as the royalty, the judiciary and the special position of bumiputras.

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak had pledged to abolish the law and replace it with the National Harmony Bill, but is now under pressure from right-wing groups to change his stance.

Rais said although not all criticism towards the government is seditious, action should be taken against any incitement towards the Agong because he is a figurehead of the country and no mere individual.

“Likewise, action should be taken against incitement towards judges because they are the symbol of the judiciary,” he said.

As for critics who argue that the Sedition Act invalid as it was passed before Merdeka Day and is not an act of parliament, Rais replied, “They forget that under the constitution, there are transitional provisions from pre-merdeka laws to post-merdeka laws.”

Law lecturer Azmi Sharom’s legal defence team, which is fending off Azmi’s sedition charge, had raised issue with the law’s colonial origins and argued that it is unconstitutional, and hence invalid.