

## **Bouquets, brickbats for Najib over flip-flop**

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's decision to maintain and further strengthen the Sedition Act has drawn mixed responses.

Lawyers for Liberty (LFL) executive director Eric Paulsen dismissed the prime minister, who had earlier promised to repeal the Act, as a "false democrat".

"In holding on to power, he is willing to do anything including leaving his 'moderate' image and becoming an ultra-Malay right advocate, retaining an odious legislation, by his own words a 'relic from a bygone era'.

"Not surprising since he has been flip-flopping for a while now despite his repeated promise to abolish the Sedition Act," he said.

DAP lawmaker Gobind Singh Deo said it was unconstitutional to maintain the Act.

"Quite obvious that the prime minister who said the Sedition Act would be abolished is back-tracking on the assurance he gave.

"This does not reflect well on Najib, who is not able to take the pressure coming from certain factions inside Umno.

"We are still going to challenge the Act in court, as it is unconstitutional. We will see what the law has to say regarding this," he added.

Suaram director Yap Swee Seng expressed disappointment with Najib.

"This does not do good for his reputation as the promise to repeal the Sedition Act was made publicly and known by the international committee.

"The argument to protect the Malay rights with the Sedition Act is invalid as that is already stated under the Federal Constitution," he said.

Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim tweeted that the people should protest this move.

"The Sedition Act 1948 was used by the British colonisers to oppress local freedom fighters is now being used to defend Umno. Najib has failed yet again," he added.

'Restored confidence in his leadership'

Handing a bouquet to Najib, Umno MP Bung Moktar Radin said the people were relieved by

the latest development.

"The people are relieved that the prime minister announced that the Sedition Act would be maintained for the importance of the country," he tweeted.

Housing, Local Government and Urban Well-Being Minister Abdul Rahman Dahlan described it as the "correct decision".

"I would like to convey my thanks to Najib as he made the right decision by placing the seditious calls for secession (Sabah and Sarawak) under the Sedition Act.

"The Sedition Act would not just be retained but be fortified. There would be no more insults to religions and calls for secession of Sabah from Malaysia," he tweeted.

Former information minister Zainuddin Maidin said that Najib has restored confidence in his leadership.

"For sure, his announcement would dispel the negative perception that he had bowed to pressure from liberal groups," he added in his blog.

Meanwhile, on the sidelines of the Umno general assembly, Umno Women's chief Shahrizat Abdul Jalil said she is relieved that Najib had heeded urgings from the wing to retain the law.

"God willing, much good will come from the prime minister's announcement. I ask Malaysians - whether Malays, Chinese, Indians, Sabahans or Sarawakisans - to live as a big family.

"Politics must have its limits. If we hold on to all that is written in the (federal) constitution, we will all be safe," she said.

'Retaining the law is the right solution'

People's Progressive Party president M Kayveas told reporters that retaining the law is the "right solution" after people took advantage of Najib's promise to repeal it to impinge on sensitive issues.

At the time the promise was made, he said, the level in unity in the country seemed high.

When asked whether renegeing on his promise would affect Najib's credibility, Kayveas (left) replied, "I don't think so... It only shows that he is a firm leader.

"I think it shows that he has principles, that he is a firm leader, and he is not going to bend just because of some other kind of pressure."

As for Sabah Liberal Democratic Party president Teo Chee Kang, he said it does not matter whether the Sedition Act is retained or not, as long as improvements are made.

“No doubt that the Act is a very archaic piece of legislation that was enacted during the British days, but so long as it is improved with new provisions relevant to handle the issues that we are facing today, I think that is fine,” he said.

Gua Musang MP Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah said it is high time the government put its foot down and stop the “nonsense” of people taking advantage of sensitive issues racial and religious issues.

However, he felt that Najib should have also addressed the issue of corruption to show that the party is serious in tackling it, whether the allegations that the party is corrupt are true or not.

“Najib said that he is serious, but people think he is not so serious,” he said.

Damaging country's shaky reputation

The Human Rights Watch has also slammed Najib's u-turn as "a major reversal on human rights that will seriously degrade Malaysia's already shaky reputation in the international community.

Human Rights Watch deputy director for the Asia Division Phil Robertson added that the government would continue to use the Sedition Act to charge opposition members and those who are not on the same page.

“By endorsing the Sedition Act, Najib is doubling down on his bet that a rights abusing strategy is the best way to maintain power - even if it requires gagging the Malaysian people by ending free expression on important social and political issues.

“Since the Sedition Act gives the government the discretion to declare almost anything seditious, social activists and political opposition figures are likely to face a renewed crackdown that will be discriminatory and politically motivated,” Robertson said in a statement today.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (left) said the decision made by the prime minister was not just applauded by the Umno delegates but in fact the whole of Malaysia.

“We are relieved with the decision made by the prime minister. Solidifying the Sedition Act not just garners a standing ovation from the delegates in the hall but from the whole of Malaysia.”

He added that there were many parties that wanted to do away with the act and not replace it, which the BN government has stood strong by not repealing it.

“BN holds firm that the political reality and the political mould must be suited with the importance, needs, security and well-being of plural society in Malaysia.”

Defence Minister Hishammuddin Hussein on the other hand added that if the Sedition Act is to be repealed, the laws should be taken into consideration first.

“To repeal or add on to the Sedition Act, we have to see if the laws are sufficient for the attorney-general to take action and if the judiciary can sentence punishments.”

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