

Najib's U-turn puzzles US, says envoy
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INTERVIEW The United States is "puzzled" with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's decision to backtrack and retain the Sedition Act, said its ambassador to Malaysia Joseph Y Yun.

"When it was announced that the government will repeal the Sedition Act and replace it with the proposed National Harmony Act in 2012, it was very much welcomed by the international community.

"So we were a little bit puzzled why the Malaysian government announced that it will not be repealed and instead will be strengthened," he added in an interview.

The ambassador, however, expressed hope that Malaysian political players and society would have a "lively debate" over the matter.

"We are clearly paying attention to it," added Yun, who is Korean American.

The ambassador's statement on the Sedition Act was part of an exclusive interview with Malaysiakini yesterday.

During the interview, Yun was candid on the need for separation of powers and what should be the concept of democracy, as well US' concerns about human rights being infringed in South Asia.

The full interview would be published on Monday.

Announcing the reversal during last week's Umno general assembly, Najib, who is also the party president, said that the Act would be strengthened as well.

He added that amendments needed to be made in order to protect Islam and other faiths as well as to deal with the calls for secession of Sabah and Sarawak.

Responding to critics, Najib said his responsibility as prime minister was to safeguard the nation's peace and harmony.

However, speculation is rife that the premier was forced to bow to pressure from the right wing in Umno as well as hardline movements.

Meanwhile, US Vice-President Joe Biden also tweeted his concerns about the Sedition Act and other laws being used to stifle the opposition in Malaysia.

Act protects every Malaysian

In a statement issued this evening, Foreign Minister Anifah Aman said the government has decided to retain and strengthen the Sedition Act in the interest of preserving peace and stability in multiracial and multicultural Malaysia.

"It is incumbent upon the government to safeguard the country's growth and prosperity and well-being of the people.

"Thus appropriate laws need to be in place to tackle issues that could cause racial and religious tension and curb detrimental acts that could breach the harmony enjoyed by all Malaysians," he added.

Anifah said the government is confident that the Sedition Act will protect the interests of each and every Malaysian and is necessary to prevent extremist acts such as racial and religious extremism.

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