

**Drop outdated sedition charges, US tells M'sia**  
**MalaysiaKini.com**  
**Apr 15, 2015**

The United States has urged Putrajaya to drop sedition charges against those who criticised the government or the judiciary, following amendments to the Sedition Act 1948.

"We welcome the decision to remove provisions outlawing criticism of the government and the judiciary, and we hope the Government of Malaysia will therefore reconsider recent sedition charges brought under those now-defunct sections of the law," US State Department acting spokesperson Marie Harf said in a statement today.

The Sedition (Amendments) Bill 2015 was passed last week, which, among others, removed provisions which criminalised inciting hatred, contempt or causing dissatisfaction against the government.

The bill was sought the deletion of paragraph 3(1)(c) of the same act which criminalises the act of sowing hatred or contempt or raising dissatisfaction towards the administration of justice in Malaysia.

Currently, the amendments are not in effect because it is will need to be scrutinised by the Dewan Negara before it is gazetted.

**Free speech at risk**

Meanwhile, Harf said the US was still concerned about other aspects of the amended Sedition Act which threatens to restrict unduly speech and public discourse.

"Particularly worrying are new provisions that increase penalties -including for first-time offenders - and could make sharing allegedly seditious material on social media a crime.

"The public debate of ideas can be among the best protections against intolerance and can play a positive role in strengthening democracy and combating hatred," she said.

Prior to amending the Sedition Act, political cartoonist Zulkiflee Anwar Haque, better known Zunar (right), was slapped with nine sedition charges over various postings on Twitter mocking the Federal Court for jailing PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim.

The US has come under criticism including from its own former ambassador to Malaysia John Malott for the country's kid's glove treatment of Malaysia amid growing crackdown on dissent.

Malott had claimed US president Barack Obama, who had a private golf session with Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak last year, had bought the latter's empty reform promises.

**Sedition dragnet**

A day after the passing of amended the Sedition Act, influential magazine The Economist said it was time Najib be dressed down and be called out for the divide between spin and substance.

Najib had in 2012 promised the abolition of the Sedition Act but went back on his word two years later, following pressure from his own party and instead vowed to strengthen the colonial era law.

In the three years after Najib's promise, at least 97 people have been probed under the Sedition Act, a more than six fold increase compared to three years before that, according to the International Commission of Jurists.

The updated Sedition Act abolishes fines as punishment in favour of mandatory jail.

The maximum jail term was also raised from three years to 20 years.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd  
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/295313>