

Najib denies Parliament a 'rubber stamp'

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By Nigel Aw

The fact that some laws proposed by the government get amended due to feedback from the legislature is evidence the government does not treat Parliament as a rubber stamp, said Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

“Sometimes the (Parliament’s) suggestions are accepted and amendments are made when the bills are debated.

“This shows in terms of the executive, including myself - I have never seen Parliament as just a rubber stamp.

“Instead, I am appreciative of the quality of debate including the suggestions made by MPs in Parliament,” he said in his opening speech at the National Conference of Parliament and State Assemblies Speakers 2015 in Kuala Lumpur this morning.

The prime minister added he appreciated Parliament’s role as a check and balance and said the House can scrutinise government policies such as the Government Transformation Programme and Economic Transformation Programme.

Najib also said that in an era of social media where the rakyat is hungry for information, they will often observe the quality of debates in Parliament.

He also urged speakers to uphold the reputation, credibility and integrity of their respective legislature in line with the state and federal constitutions.

“In carrying out their responsibilities and role, the speakers surely face the challenges of balancing the interest of the government as well as the demands of political parties and the rakyat.

“At the same time, thy have to ensure the culture of open debate when presiding over the House,” he said.

‘Reform Parliament if Najib is sincere’

However, Padang Serai MP N Surendran said Najib’s assertion that Parliament was not a rubber stamp is “laughable”.

“By Commonwealth standards our Parliament is weak, impotent and helpless in the face of executive power.

“The main tools by which the opposition in a Westminster-style parliament can check the government have been denied us,” said Surendran in a statement later today.

For example, he said unlike other Commonwealth countries, there is not a day where the opposition is allowed to move debates including motions to censure government ministries, rendering their motions useless on order papers.

He added that this prevents the Opposition from holding the government accountable, such as being unable to force a full debate on issues such as 1Malaysia Development Berhad or the Goods and Services Tax.

Furthermore, Surendran (photo) said unlike the UK which only requires a two-day notice for submitting questions to ministers, Malaysia's Parliament requires a month's notice.

He added that the recently-passed Prevention of Terrorism Act and the amendments to the Sedition Act which were bulldozed through within a day was indication enough that Parliament is like a rubber stamp.

"Instead of making such incredible claims, Najib should take steps to immediately reform Parliament and allow it to function as envisaged under our democratic constitution," he said.

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