

Bar Council slams use of sedition laws
Malaysiakini.com
May 9, 2008

The Bar Council today expressed its alarm over the disturbing trend in the use of the Sedition Act as a means of stifling debate and exchange of opinions.
MCPX

The council asserted that the Act should not be used against anybody in exercising their constitutional right of freedom of speech.

bar council lingam tape 241007In a statement today, the Bar Council chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan expressed her concerns over reports that Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had instructed a police report to be lodged against DAP chairperson Karpal Singh.

"This move following the recent charges of sedition against Raja Petra Kamarudin and Syed Akhbar Ali signals a disturbing trend towards the use of archaic and oppressive legislation such as the Sedition Act as a means of stifling debate and exchange of opinions," she said.

On Tuesday bloggers Raja Petra and Syed Akhbar were separately charged with sedition for articles appearing in the former's Malaysia Today website.

Raja Petra was charged over an article that allegedly implied that Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and his wife were involved in the killing of a young Mongolian woman.

Meanwhile Syed Akhbar was charged for posting an allegedly seditious comment in one of the blog posts which touched on Malays and Islam.

Police reports

parliament bbc karpal singh police report 080508 02Following from this, senior politician Karpal might fall under the same charge should the Attorney-General choose to act on a police report lodged yesterday by Barisan Nasional Backbenchers (BBC) members and the coalition of Malay NGOs - Malay Unity Action Front (BBPM).

They claimed that remarks made by Karpal - who questioned the legal rights of Perak's Sultan Azlan Shah in reinstating the state's Islamic Department director Jamry Sury who was transferred after allegedly refusing cooperation with the new Pakatan Rakyat government - was 'seditious and rude in its nature'.

At the same time, the prime minister also said yesterday that he had instructed Umno secretary-general Tengku Adnan Mansor to lodge the police report against Karpal, following which a report was made at the Sentul police station yesterday afternoon.

The premier accused the Bukit Gelugor MP of being ignorant of the Sultan's scope of duties and that many Malaysians, including non-Malays, were upset with his statement.

PM versus the royalty

Ambiga pointed out that many issues concerning public and constitutional law including

state laws and convention have surfaced since the March 8 general elections.

This included the controversy surrounding the appointment of the Terengganu and Perlis menteri besar.

"Many members of the government and public took strong positions in relation to the actions of the state's Regent and its Regency Advisory Council including the appointment of the menteri besar was unconstitutional," she said.

Previously, there was a disagreement between the PM and the royal heads of state in Perlis and Terengganu over the appointment of their respective menteri besar.

PM wanted Shahidan Kassim (Perlis) and Idris Jusoh (Terengganu) to retain their menteri besar posts but both were ousted by Dr Md Isa Sabu and Ahmad Said - preferred candidates who were later appointed by the Terengganu Sultan and Perlis Raja.

The outspoken Bar Council chairperson then alluded that Karpal's comments were made in similar circumstances.

"Likewise the views expressed by Karpal are his opinion on the legal issues relating to the transfer of Jamry.

"Using the Sedition Act against him is a stifling of healthy debate that has in fact already been taking place over the last few months in other instances," she said.

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