

# Amendments to law on kids born abroad to be tabled in September

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Amendments to the law will be tabled in Parliament this September to allow "a parent" of a child born abroad to apply for his citizenship, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"We will be tabling amendments to the Federal Constitution to replace the words "whose father" in Part I and Part II of the Second Schedule with the words 'at least one of the parents,'" the Prime Minister announced at the opening of the International Malaysia Law Conference here yesterday.

He said the matter would be brought to the Conference of Rulers for consent, which is required if constitutional amendments are to be made.

"I believe the proposal will be given support and it will be done soon, by this month," he added.

He said swift action is needed to

resolve the issues, as the Home Ministry had received numerous citizenship applications under Article 15(A) of the Constitution.

In March, Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail told Parliament that there were 688 citizenship applications involving children born to Malaysian mothers abroad, although many more have yet to submit their applications.

When met after the event, Anwar said the amendments are aimed at seeking fairness not only for Malaysian fathers but also for mothers of children born overseas.

"The law states that citizenship is given to children whose father is a citizen; it does not include the mother. So, we want both parents to be included under the Constitution," he said.

He added that there should not be any controversy over the pro-

posed amendments, as they are meant to address the issue of the citizenship of a child.

In his special address, the founding president of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin Tuanku Muhriz applauded the effort by the government to address the issue of stateless children but still expressed caution on the proposed amendments.

"My colleagues and I advocating for children's and refugee rights are pleased with the promised amendment to allow citizenship for children born overseas to Malaysian mothers married to non-Malaysian fathers.

"However, we were profoundly disappointed by other amendments, specifically the removal of Section 1(e) of Part II in the Second Schedule, that could severely exacerbate the issue of stateless-

ness among children," said Tunku Zain, who hoped that the proposal to abolish Section 1(e) would be removed.

Several rights groups had voiced concern that the removal of Section 1(e) would have the effect of creating a new class of stateless children born in the country but whose parents are unknown.

The section currently confers automatic citizenship on foundlings, children separated from their parents with no proof of parentage, and children born to stateless parents.

Meanwhile, Anwar had also announced an increase of RM10mil in the allocation for the National Legal Aid Foundation.

He said the allocation would help the poor who are unable to afford legal representation, adding that the law would be useless if the man on the street lacks

access to justice.

"While in Sungai Buloh, I saw hundreds of prisoners who were given the chance to defend themselves fairly in a trial (thanks to the foundation). As such, I announce an increase of RM10mil for legal aid," the Prime Minister said to cheers from participants.

Anwar had announced, under Budget 2023, an increase in legal aid from RM30,000 to RM50,000.

In her welcoming speech earlier, Malaysian Bar president Karen Cheah said some two million accused persons had benefited from free legal aid from the foundation between April 2012 and June 2023.