

Pakatan calls proposed race relations law superficial
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By Yow Hong Chieh

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 29 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) has rejected the need for a race relations law as a Barisan Nasional (BN) ploy to bolster flagging public support for the government's 1 Malaysia concept, which was launched to tighten racial unity.

But lawmakers from the ruling coalition called the proposed legislation, which will be tabled in March, a necessary law that affirmed the Najib administration's commitment to multi-culturalism and tolerance.

Nurul Izzah said new laws must be created in accordance with the Federal Constitution and not just sanctioned by BN. — File pic

PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar pointed out that even with existing laws, right-wing groups and the mainstream press have escaped censure despite spouting allegedly racist and seditious remarks.

She said this continuing inaction proved BN was keener on using superficial transformation to strengthen its hold on the country rather than allow existing institutions to protect the rights of all Malaysians.

"Even if we happen to have the perfect race relations law, without fair implementation it becomes a mockery to the rakyat, just like the PM's previous pronouncement on Malaysia having the best democracy in the world," she told The Malaysian Insider.

The Lembah Pantai MP stressed that new laws must be created in accordance with the Federal Constitution and not just sanctioned by BN, but expressed doubt government leaders understood the constitutional rights accorded to Malaysians.

Putrajaya should set up a parliamentary select committee to study the impact of the Race Relations Act considering the "shoddy, ill-advised" laws proposed before this, she added.

Salahuddin said there was no need to have a Bill for the time being.

PAS vice-president Salahuddin Ayub said it would be good for the government and de facto law minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz to hold discussions on the proposed law before it is tabled in Parliament.

He added that he was not convinced there was a need for a law governing race relations in Malaysia as the nation was not facing any serious problems.

"There is no need to have a Bill for the time being but there is a need for discussion," the Kubang Kerian MP said.

DAP international secretary Liew Chin Tong said the "suspicious" law appeared to be a return to the Cold War mentality cautioned against by the prime minister in his Malaysia Day speech.

"The Cold War mentality is one that is about control and assuming the government knows

best," he said.

"But the context has changed. The question now is no longer a question of control but how to facilitate dialogue."

The Bukit Bendera MP also questioned if there was a need for the law now that all races lived cheek by jowl and Malays made up the majority population in most cities.

"Is the question of race still important?" he asked.

Liew questioned the need for the law now that all races lived cheek by jowl. Umno lawmaker Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said said that while she had not been briefed on the proposed Race Relations Act, it was likely the proposed law was partially a response to heated online debates.

"I suppose, to give the benefit of doubt to the government, there must be a reason for it..." the Pengerang MP said.

"It's much easier to provoke a lot of issues in the Internet age, especially since people are anonymous. They can trigger a lot of anger with texts and through Facebook."

But Kota Belud MP Datuk Abdul Rahman Dahlan said the public had misconstrued the intent of the law as it was not about regulating race relations but preventing racial and religious profiling.

"It is not about managing relationships between Malays, Chinese and Indians. It's about making sure you're not discriminated against based colour or race," he said.

The BN Backbenchers Club vice-president said the proposed law would ensure that Malaysia was "in tune" with the developed world, pointing out that Britain had similar laws.

"It is a very interesting Act. Certainly, it will make for a better Malaysia. It will represent the spirit of 1 Malaysia. We should encourage it.

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