

Mat Sabu charge will boost opposition support, says MCA veep
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 24 — An MCA leader today slammed the move to charge PAS's Mohamad Sabu for his Bukit Kepong remarks, predicting it would tarnish the government's image and elicit sympathy for the federal opposition.

MCA vice-president Gan Ping Sieu said prosecuting the PAS deputy president would also give the opposition the opportunity to cast doubt on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's recent promise to increase civil liberties.

Gan added that the government should have allowed Mohamad and his supporters to "continue making a fool of themselves" instead of taking the matter to court.

"Historical controversies ought to be resolved through level-headed debates and academic researches.

"Resorting to the courts may shed a negative light on the government and allow the opposition to spread cynicisms on the goodwill the prime minister has generated by the Malaysia Day eve groundbreaking reforms pledge, especially the abolishment of the Internal Security Act (ISA)," he said in a statement today.

Mohamad, popularly known as Mat Sabu, claimed trial on Wednesday to a criminal defamation charge of glorifying communist guerrillas and defaming the policemen and soldiers who defended the Bukit Kepong police station when it came under attack in 1950.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) immediately accused Najib of contradicting his own promise to improve civil liberties, with Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim describing the move as "malicious persecution".

Najib announced a raft of reforms last week to give Malaysians more freedom but Mohamad's prosecution has renewed fears of a crackdown against dissent.

Opposition politicians are convinced that the Najib administration will continue to prosecute its rivals despite the prime minister's reform pledges, pointing out plans to replace the ISA with two new security laws.

Umno's Utusan Malaysia had first accused the Mat Sabu of glorifying Ahmad Indera in an August 27 report that quoted him as saying that the communist leader was a true hero.

Despite disagreeing with the move to charge Mat Sabu, Gan stressed today that he opposed the PAS leader's remarks as it had hurt the families of the victims in the tragedy.

"Many are furious with his views, especially those in Johor, where I come from. His statement is hurtful and has caused painful grievances to the victims' families and their descendants. It reflects the true character of a mischievous politician," he said.

He likened Mat Sabu's controversial remarks to that of DAP MP M. Manoharan's statement

about changing the Jalur Gemilang once the opposition seizes power, saying they were symptoms of "politicians intoxicated by the lust to take over Putrajaya".

Mat Sabu faces two years in prison and a fine if convicted.

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