

Bar Council wants death penalty scrapped
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 10 — Lawyers unanimously passed a resolution at the Bar Council annual general meeting (AGM) today calling for capital punishment to be abolished and replaced with life imprisonment instead.

Bar Council president Lim Chee Wee urged Datuk Seri Najib Razak to add this to his administration's series of law reforms, saying the move should be "leadership driven".

"We, the (Malaysian) Bar, would like the prime minister to lead and say that the government will take the lead and put in an immediate moratorium on any death penalty sentences and act with speed to repeal all death penalty punishments in the statute books," he told a press conference today after the AGM.

"We look to leadership by the honourable prime minister to actually say that in Malaysia, as a country that wants to be progressive and liberal, this is not something we want in our statute books."

Lim claimed that empirical evidence from surveys has shown that despite the introduction of mandatory death sentences for an offence like drug trafficking, the number of cases continues to increase.

"Death penalty has zero deterrent effect, so why keep it in our books?" he said.

He pointed out that in light of weaknesses in the country's legal system, innocent individuals could be found guilty of the offence and sentenced to death despite not committing the crime.

Lim urged parliamentarians to join the council in its campaign against the death penalty by pushing for amendments to current laws when the House sits from next week until April.

Earlier this month, de facto law minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz said the government could only abolish capital punishment in Malaysia if the majority of its citizens supports such a move.

He added that the problem in doing away with the law is not an administrative one, but rather that the majority of Malaysians still does not favour it.

"Many Malays, Muslims are very rigid with the way they behave when it comes to (abolishing) the death sentence, because they think that it is always about an eye for an eye.

"It is important to convince Muslims and say that it is not necessarily an eye for an eye... the problem (with the abolishment) is not so much the government, it is society," he had said during a university debate forum on the death penalty.

Earlier during today's AGM, the Bar Council also passed resolutions rejecting recent amendments to the Employment Act 1955 and approving the implementation of the "Continuing Professional Development" scheme (CPD).

The scheme, which will undergo a two-year trial phase before full implementation, stipulates that all lawyers must commit 16 hours in the span of two years to attend courses, seminars, workshops, conferences or other appropriate events for the purpose of constantly updating their legal knowledge.

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