

Prove it! Father and son tell Najib
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DAP's Lim Kit Siang and Lim Guan Eng want the premier to go the extra mile to prove his sincerity with regard to the repealing of the Sedition Act.

PETALING JAYA: In his latest transformation move, Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak has announced the repealing of a legislation which has been a potent weapon in the ruling government's arsenal to silence dissent. But the father and son in DAP remain unconvinced.

While both Lim Kit Siang and Guan Eng welcomed the move to repeal the Sedition Act, the pair however wanted the prime minister to go the extra mile to prove his commitment.

Guan Eng said Najib must show that the National Harmony Act slated to replace the Sedition Act was not another thinly-disguised draconian law.

The Penang chief minister said Najib could prove his sincerity by immediately withdrawing the charges under the Sedition Act against DAP national chairperson Karpal Singh and other leaders.

Guan Eng, a former Internal Security Act detainee and victim of the Sedition Act himself, said the prime minister should also apologise to all those convicted under both these legislation.

"DAP welcomes the repeal of this draconian and antiquated piece of legislation that has over half a century been used and abused to suppress legitimate political opposition.

"However, we also urge the government to ensure that its replacement will not end up like the newly-introduced Peaceful Assembly Act which has turned out to be nothing but a sham," he added.

The Peaceful Assembly Act, Lim noted, introduced a multitude of arbitrary requirements, making it even more difficult for people to assemble, and it even outlawed street protests.

"Worse, the Act has now been used to selectively prosecute opposition leaders including [Pakatan Rakyat supremo] Anwar Ibrahim over the Bersih 3.0 rally," he added.

Convenient political tool

Relating his experience, Lim said that he was convicted and imprisoned for 18 months in 1998 under the Sedition Act.

The DAP leader said he was hauled to court for allegedly making seditious remarks in his defence of an under-aged girl who was detained despite being a rape victim.

"These charges were filed against me even though there had been no demonstrations against me for defending this under-aged rape victim.

"This is because no one in their right mind will make such a demonstration against someone who was defending the victim instead of the rapist. And yet I ended up charged," he added.

Lim's case had stemmed from the controversy surrounding former Malacca chief minister Rahim Thamby Chik, who was charged with the statutory rape of a minor.

However, the public prosecutor later withdrew the charge citing lack of evidence but the incident dealt Rahim's political career a lethal blow.

Lim was later charged with sedition for printing and distributing pamphlets containing details of the allegation against Rahim.

The DAP leader said like the now-repealed ISA, the Sedition Act had also been used as a convenient political tool against members of the opposition, journalists and NGO leaders.

He noted that the prime minister himself recently admitted that the ISA was a political tool that was used for "wrongful reasons" in the past.

"If that is the case, then Najib should now prove his sincerity and commitment to reform by not only withdrawing all existing charges against Karpal and other leaders but also issuing an official apology to those convicted under both Sedition Act as well as the ISA," he added.

Malaysians are wary

Meanwhile, Kit Siang wanted the attorney-general to withdraw the Sedition Act charges against Karpal as well as Hindraf leader P Uthayakumar.

"While the repeal is welcomed and had been the subject of demands for democratisation for decades, Malaysians are understandably wary of Najib's announcement," he said.

The veteran politician said this was because the prime minister's promise of political transformation had not resulted in the full democratisation of the rights of Malaysians.

This, he pointed out, was illustrated by the "high-handed and unconscionable police crackdown" on peaceful Bersih 3.0 demonstrators and the post-April 28 state-sponsored campaign of vilification and demonisation against Bersih 3.0's organisers and protesters.

"What is equally of grave concern to patriotic Malaysians is the growing culture of impunity by irresponsible quarters to stoke hatred to create racial and religious ill-will and polarisation through a high-level diabolical campaign of lies and falsehoods to perpetuate Umno/Barisan Nasional's hold on power in the forthcoming general election," he said.

Lim also questioned if Najib's latest announcement on the repeal of the Sedition Act was part of the prime minister's programme designed to make Malaysia "the best democracy in the world"?

"If so, why he is not prepared to make the most important commitment of all, that Umno/BN and he himself will fully accept and even facilitate a peaceful transfer of power at the federal level if this is the choice of the Malaysian voters in the next general election?" he asked.

Both the Sedition Act and ISA gained notoriety during the protracted reign of former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was responsible for the biggest ISA dragnet in 1987.

The 87-year-old former premier had defended such laws as essential tools to maintain order and until now, denied that the legislation were used for political purposes.

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