

New Harmony Act to protect multi-racial society

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By RAZAK AHMAD and LOSHANA K. SHAGAR

KUALA LUMPUR: The Sedition Act 1948 will be repealed and replaced with a new National Harmony Act in the latest measure under the country's political transformation plan, announced [Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak](#).

The Prime Minister also announced that recent amendments to laws as well as new ones relating to civil liberties would be implemented immediately.

They are the Security Offences Act (Special Measures), the Printing Presses and Publications Act involving newspapers' annual permit as well as the Universities and University Colleges Act that allows students to be involved in politics.

He said the decision to replace the Sedition Act was made to find a mechanism that could determine the best balance between guaranteeing every citizen's freedom of expression and the need to tackle the complex nature of the country's multi-racial and multi-religious society.

"With this new Act, we will be better equipped to manage our national fault lines. It will also help to strengthen national cohesion by protecting national unity and nurturing religious harmony," Najib said in his speech at a dinner with the Attorney-General's Chambers last night.

He said that without the ideal balance, freedom of speech would be stunted, the people's creativity and innovativeness would be dulled while at the same time unleashing chauvinism and extremism.

This balance, said Najib, must be achieved within a society that is more open, with access to the information highway which could trigger information overflow, higher level of education and socio-economic achievements and higher expectations.

Under the proposed Act, he said any attempt by anyone to pit the community against each other would be considered a crime against the people of Malaysia.

"As Malaysians, we must take a stand that if any race or religion is hurt, then the whole community has been hurt, as in the Malay saying that if the right thigh is pinched, the left will also feel the pain'."

Najib said provisions in the new Act would focus on inculcating and protecting harmony and respect within Malaysian society from the action of irresponsible people.

It would allow the Government to act against those who use sensitive issues to split national unity.

He said the new Act would, however, maintain the Government's powers to act against those inciting hatred in order to give rise to disloyalty to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong or any Malay Ruler; those who spread ill will and animosity between races; and those who question any right, special position, privileges and prerogatives enshrined and protected under Part 3 or Articles 152, 153 and 181 of the Federal Constitution.

Najib called on individuals as well as organisations to give their views on matters that needed to be tackled under the proposed new Act, adding the A-G's Chambers had been directed to get the views from all the stakeholders.

Meanwhile, Bar Council [chairman Lim Chee Wee](#) welcomed the repeal, and said it would now focus on the replacement Act.

"We hope it will be consistent with the best international practices," he said, confident it would not be a case of "old wine in a new bottle".

Umno Youth chief and Rembau MP Khairy Jamaluddin tweeted that the Sedition Act would be replaced by something that reflected substantive transformation.

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