

**National Harmony Act Replaces Sedition Act 1948 – Najib  
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KUALA LUMPUR, July 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak tonight announced that the Sedition Act 1948 will be repealed and replaced with a new act to be known as the National Harmony Act.

The decision to repeal the act was to find a mechanism that could ensure the best balance between the need to guarantee the freedom of speech for every citizen and the need to handle the complexity of plurality existing in the country, he said at the dinner of the Attorney-General's Chambers with the Prime Minister at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre here.

"With this new act we would 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," he said.

Also present were the Chief Secretary to the Government Datuk Seri Dr Ali Hamsa and Attorney-General Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail.

Najib said that the absence of an ideal balance could suppress the freedom of speech which was guaranteed by the Federal Constitution, hinder one's creativity and innovativeness or promote the spirit of chauvinism and extremism.

He said the balance must be achieved in a more open social environment with access to information which could lead to information overflow, an increasing standard of education and socio-economy and rising expectation.

"The provisions proposed in the National Harmony Act will stress on inculcating the spirit of harmony and mutual respect in the Malaysian society made up of various races and religions," he said.

He said the new bill would be more specific in nature and would enable the government to act against anyone using sensitive issues to break up national solidarity.

The Prime Minister said the government would ensure that the provisions of the new act would not hinder the power to tackle acts that could cause hatred and humiliation or stoke the feelings of disloyalty to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong or any Ruler.

It also covered acts that could create enmity between the races and question whatever rights, positions, privileges, sovereignty or prerogative protected in the Constitution.

"Before formulating the National Harmony Bill, the government wants to invite views and opinions from Malaysians, whether individuals or organisations on matters that need to be addressed in drawing up the legislation.

"The Attorney-General's Chambers has been tasked as the agency responsible for getting the opinions of all stakeholders," he said.

Najib said the government was aware that there were groups who considered the Sedition Act as a tool to prevent action or views that were contradictory to the government's stand, but pointed out that this perception was totally unfounded.

"As such, the new provisions will not prevent the people from criticising the government and the administration of justice. Any act that is in contempt of court will be handled by the judiciary itself through the existing provisions in the existing Rules of Court," he said. Meanwhile, Najib also said the government decided to enforce immediately all new laws and amendments to the existing laws which were announced in the Political Transformation Plan including the Security Offences Act (Special Measures); Printing Presses and Publications Act; and the Universities and University Colleges Act.

"Through the abolition and formulation of the ongoing bills, the government wants to ensure that adequate democratic space is provided for differences of opinion and competing ideas.

"Basically, we want to create one Malaysia where the principles of human rights is upheld, the individual's liberty to express opinions openly is welcomed, and the interest of the individuals and the community is balanced," he said.

The Prime Minister also said that the Attorney-General's Chambers could be likened to a compass that showed the direction to ensure that the principles of the supremacy of the constitution and the rule of law were always upheld.

"I take great pride that the staff of the Attorney-General's Chambers have never been complacent with the adulation and praise accorded and never over-reacted to any allegation or slander made against the agency," he said.

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