

Najib says willing to forgive mooning, but law cannot forget
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 6 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today he was prepared to forgive a 19-year-old student for baring his buttocks at photographs of the prime minister and his wife at a pro-democracy gathering last week, but the boy will still have to face the full extent of the law.

The police had arrested the boy as well as a number of other teenagers for stomping on the same photographs, in what opposition politicians say is an over-reaction to the exuberance of young activists.

Speaking in Besut, Terengganu today, Najib said he had no qualms about forgiving the boy.

“But the principle is the legal process cannot be compromised and must continue. On the question of him wanting to see me, that can be arranged,” he told reporters.

The Umno-linked New Straits Times newspaper reported today that the boy’s father has apologised over the incident.

His son was also expelled from a private college over the incident.

It is unclear what charges the boy faces, but the police had arrested him under the Sedition Act, which Najib had announced earlier this year would be repealed.

Sedition is not clearly defined and this was one of the reasons for the planned repeal as its use has sparked complaints against abuse by the authorities.

Earlier today, another teenager apologised for stepping on the prime minister’s picture at Dataran Merdeka during the countdown of the country’s 55th National Day last week.

Ong Sing Yee, 19, had surrendered to the police in Johor yesterday to help in investigations over the incident.

The police were reported to have set up three task forces to investigate three separate incidents of hooliganism that took place over the National Day weekend.

A firestorm erupted last week after several individuals were recorded tearing up posters bearing images of the prime minister, his wife and Election Commission chairman Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof at the same event.

Several other people were spotted waving a flag with an alternative design — now identified as the Sang Saka Malaya — instead of the Jalur Gemilang at the National Day bash last Thursday night.

Bukit Aman’s CID director Datuk Seri Mohd Bakri Zinin told The Malaysian Insider that the police were probing the two separate incidents under the Sedition Act — despite Putrajaya’s decision to repeal the controversial law that has been widely panned as a tool to curb political dissent.

Mohd Bakri said the police were probing the flag incident as an attempt to incite hatred with intent to create public disorder under Section 4 (1)(a) of the Sedition Act 1948.

He added that stepping on pictures of Najib and wife were considered offences under Sections 290 and 504 of the Penal Code for being public nuisances and intentionally causing insult with an intent to provoke break the public peace, respectively.

Those convicted under Section 290 may be fined up to RM400 while those found guilty under Section 504 are liable to be jailed up to two years or fined, or both.

However, Section 4 (1)(a) of the Sedition Act prescribes a mandatory jail term of three years or a fine of up to RM5,000 for first offenders, which is subsequently raised to five years' jail for repeat offences.

One person has owned up to waving the Sang Saka Malaya flag instead of the Jalur Gemilang during the 55th National Day countdown here last week but defended the act as an attempt to educate the public about the country's history instead of being a bid to replace the national flag.

Opposition leaders and the organisers of the "Janji Demokrasi" rally — a group of 47 NGOs that had gathered at the same venue that night to remind the Barisan Nasional (BN) of its electoral reform pledges — have been blamed for the acts.

Leaders from the Pakatan Rakyat (PR) opposition pact and the "Janji Demokrasi" organisers have denied the allegations, rubbishing the claims as "baseless" attempts from their political foes to gain points ahead of the 13th general election due soon.

Political rivalry between BN and PR has intensified in recent days as the window for the next poll narrows in a race that could see a regime change in Malaysia for the first time in 55 years.

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