

**With academic's case, Najib's sedition dragnet now an outrageous farce, says Anwar**  
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**By ANISAH SHURFA**

Putrajaya's move to widen the sedition dragnet and charge a law professor under the Sedition Act today has turned its recent clampdown on government dissenters into an "outrageous farce", Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said today.

He said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his administration were responsible for the slew of charges, as they were "part and parcel of the executive".

"Today, this wave of repression has taken on the hue of an outrageous farce with the prosecution of law professor Dr Azmi Sharom for expressing his academic opinion on the Selangor MB crisis," said Anwar in a statement this evening.

"Incidentally, though it was not a view that was pro-Umno, neither was it pro-PKR in any way.

"But as a firm believer in academic freedom, I maintain that Azmi has every right to express his views."

Azmi today pleaded not guilty to charges under Section 4(1)(b) and Section 4(1)(c) of the Sedition Act.

The law professor's allegedly seditious remarks, published in a news portal on August 14, include: "You don't want a repeat of that, where a secret meeting took place."

Another was: "I think what happened in Perak was legally wrong. The best thing to do is do it as legally and transparently as possible".

Azmi had been commenting on the Selangor menteri besar impasse in which he warned Pakatan Rakyat against taking action outside the state assembly as what happened in Perak.

Anwar today also accused Najib of attempting to hijack democracy by using the Sedition Act to get rid of his political foes.

He said the recent charges made against Pakatan Rakyat (PR) elected representatives using the law could lead to at least six parliamentary by-elections (including Anwar's own appeal against his sodomy conviction at the Federal Court) and three state assembly by-elections.

"What we are seeing is thus a blatant and shameless attempt by Najib to hijack democracy by having duly elected lawmakers from Pakatan to be stripped of their democratic entitlements and disqualified from contesting in the subsequent by-elections.

"This will be a grave perversion of justice via the back door of the Attorney-General's chambers," Anwar said.

The PR leaders charged with sedition are Pandan MP Rafizi Ramli, Serai MP N Surendran, Seri Setia assemblyman Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, Seputeh MP Teresa Kok, Batu MP Tian Chua, Shah Alam MP Khalid Samad and Seri Delima assemblyman R.S.N. Rayer while Changkat Jering assemblyman Datuk Seri Mohammad Nizar Jamaluddin has been charged with criminal defamation.

"The statement from the Prime Minister's Office that the Sedition Act will be repealed is not only hollow but a gross lie considering the spate of prosecutions being carried.

"How can such flagrant use of an archaic and repressive law convince anyone that the government is serious about legislative reform?"

Anwar said Najib's government had failed to administer efficiently and justly, citing the racist speeches by Umno leaders and right-wing groups which remain unchecked.

"What does it say for justice and democracy when these racists and purveyors of religious extremism get off scot-free while those who speak the truth for the sake of a better, more harmonious Malaysia are treated as criminals?"

He also questioned whether the judiciary was fulfilling its duty of reigning in the executive's "abuse of power" by dismissing the "frivolous" charges.

"Do we have a strong, independent and vibrant judiciary that believes that politicians and their appointees who hold high executive office must act according to the rule of law, and not the rule of political expediency?"

"Do we have the requisite number of judges who will judge without fear or favour according to the criterion of justice?"

"Will they have the moral courage and conviction to send a clear message that they will not be party to the Executive's attempt to pervert the course of justice and violate the liberties and rights of the people as enshrined in the Constitution?"

Anwar said it was a tragic irony that Malaysians were witnessing the unbridled use of the Sedition Act amidst celebrations of the country's 57th Merdeka Day.

"True Merdeka means that we must reject this law, not use it as what the Najib government is doing, with renewed vigour and determination as an instrument of injustice and a weapon of mass oppression." – September 2, 2014.

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