

**We'll consult you before replacing Sedition Act, Najib assures Malay groups**  
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Putrajaya will consult Malay groups which have been vocal over its plan to replace the Sedition Act with the National Harmony Act, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said today.

Addressing staff of the Prime Minister's Department during its monthly assembly today, Najib noted that organisations representing the Malay community were among the most vocal on the colonial-era law, and said the government would study the reasons behind it.

"As a government, we cannot embark on something that will cause disharmony in the country. There must be a rational process whether we want the National Harmony Bill or retain the Sedition Act. If we want to change any Act, the replacement must be better than the existing one.

"As such, we will have discussions with all interest groups, especially those which represent the Malay community, we need to understand why they are so vocal and what are their issues, whether it is a question of Islam, Malay royalty, Article 153, all this we have to understand," he said.

Article 153 of the Federal Constitution spells out the special position of the Malays and Bumiputera.

Najib said the government needed to make a rational decision whether to retain or repeal the Sedition Act as any action should not affect the communities in the country.

"If we make a decision, it should not cause both the Malays and the non-Malays to be worried, less confident or threatened.

"We have to handle this process well, so that in the end, regardless of the decision, it will reflect a better environment. It is not appropriate if we take the step if it is not for the better," he said.

Over the last few weeks, Putrajaya has been on a sedition dragnet, with opposition politicians, an academic and a journalist being investigated or charged under the draconian law.

Critics have accused Najib of back-peddalling on his pledge to repeal the law, which he first promised to do away with in July 2012 as part of his reform agenda and again in an interview with British broadcaster BBC's World News programme a year later. This was again reiterated three days ago.

This comes as Najib faces pressure from his Umno grassroots and even a segment of the public who have flooded his Facebook page with requests that he not repeal the colonial-era law, which they say safeguards Islam, Malays and the royal institution.

Najib said the matter needed to be explained before the situation became worse.

"I must explain this before it turns into an uncontrollable situation, the government will not do anything that can cause instability and anger among any community," he said.

He also gave his assurance that the process would be done in a prudent and controlled manner.

"Hopefully, in the end, our country will be harmonious," he added. – September 8, 2014.

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