

NUCC's hasty bills won't speed up unity agenda, analysts say

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KUALA LUMPUR, June 15 — Merely introducing new laws to replace the controversial Sedition Act is unlikely to promote unity in the country, analysts said.

Critical of the haphazard way the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) is pushing its three proposed bills, experts warn that the plan may backfire as it lacks public engagement..

Wan Saiful Wan Jan , the executive director of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas), noted that Malaysians were in the dark as to the context for the introduction of the three bills.

“We don't know what is the bigger overall plan. We don't know what they have in mind in the long term. We don't know if they have any other new laws in mind,” the head of the think tank told *The Malay Mail Online* when contacted.

“Bearing that in mind, it is not surprising that people are cautious and suspicious and question the motivation and possible effectiveness of the bills.

“The criticism by Tun Mahathir, Islamic NGOs and many others is understandable, because they do not know what is the bigger picture,” he said, referring to former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The NUCC presented the three bills for the first time at a roundtable discussion on June 6, proposing that the Sedition Act 1948 be replaced with laws that focus on promoting harmony and prescribing mediation as a means to resolve disputes.

The bills were developed following Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's pledge in July 2012 to repeal the 1948 law as part of his push for reform and greater freedoms.

Muslim groups, however, hit out at the NUCC over the bills, claiming that the proposed laws were drafted by “Islamophobes” on the council who are “anti-Malay and anti-Islam”.

Dr Mahathir wrote on his blog Thursday that existing injustices and disparity among races will only continue if the bills are made into law, as all Malaysians regardless of social and economic standing will have to compete for the same opportunities.

Universiti Putra Malaysia analyst Prof Dr Jayum A. Jawan said replacing the Sedition Act with three pieces of legislation is an exercise in futility.

“It is still working towards the same thing. You don’t do this, don’t do that... it is still about regulating behaviour. Maybe the punishment is not as heavy as the Sedition Act, but it still involves punishment,” he said when contacted.

Jayum said it would be unreasonable to expect the public to be more united after a new set of laws are introduced, stressing that there are still a lot of kinks in racial relations that need to be ironed out after half a century of nationhood.

The true solution can only come through education and building a feeling of mutual trust between all races through the long-term process of interaction and gaining respect, trust and friendship, he added.

“The long-term solution is not about using laws to regulate relations between races. It is about education, that is what we are lacking,” he said, pointing to the National Civics Bureau (BTN) as one avenue to pursue national unity if it is revamped to cater to all Malaysians.

Wan Saiful agreed that the civics bureau could be a tool for national unity, if it is “significantly reformed” to be more inclusive and not abused to serve the political agenda for “certain ethnic groups”.

He said politicians must take that lead and move away from the current political system that is dictated by race and religion.

And in the current political climate, the ruling Barisan Nasional is in the best position to make this happen as there is already a direct membership mechanism which cuts out the need to join a particular party within the coalition, he said.

“They should activate that, campaign on that, and the PM should lead by example by quitting Umno and become just a BN member,” he said, referring to Prime Minister and Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

“He must prove that he means it when he talks about direct membership. That should be the ultimate aim, a political system that does not divide us.

“The real answer (to unity) is political will... all this 1Malaysia, NUCC, is tokenism. But the real thing that needs to be done, everybody knows it but nobody wants to act on it,” Wan Saiful said.

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