

Government Amends Sedition Act After 40 Years

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KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 (Bernama) -- The amendment to the Sedition Act 1948, which was tabled for the second time today, was made 40 years after the last amendment was made in 1975, the Dewan Rakyat was told today.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said, based on this, the government felt it was time to review the suitability of the act.

The government's action was apt when stating a clear stand to retain the Sedition Act 1948 by making certain improvements.

"This is because the Sedition Act 1948 has proven itself to be very effective in facing seditious issues and ensuring the peace enjoyed thus far is protected," he said when tabling the Sedition (Amendment) Bill 2015 for second reading at Dewan Rakyat here, today.

The Sedition Act was originally formulated to curb the Communist activities in Malaya specifically in terms of disseminating propaganda to incite the people to join its cause.

The act was amended after the May 13, 1969 incident via improvements to Section 3 by including a prerogative provision which is protected by the Federal Constitution before the last amendment was made in 1975.

Ahmad Zahid stressed the move to retain the act did not mean the government was taking a step backward, on the other hand, it was done to protect the interest of the people regardless of community and religion to prevent anything untoward from taking place.

"I urge all quarters to set aside their political ideologies and personal interests to evaluate rationally in the interests of the security and prosperity of Malaysians as a whole," he said.

Earlier, Gobind Singh Deo (DAP-Puchong) urged the tabling of the bill to be postponed as there were cases which were charged under the act that were still being decided by the Federal Court, fearing the debate on the bill would flout Standing Order 36(2), namely, matters still being considered by the court should not be mentioned.

"If the court decides the act is unconstitutional, what we do in the Dewan Rakyat is futile because the Dewan is amending a law which is not constitutional," he said.

However, Ahmad Zahid said the government would continue the tabling of the bill because the Attorney-General's Department had vouched that it would not prejudice the court.

Dewan Rakyat Speaker Tan Sri Pandikar Amin Mulia then decided to allow the tabling of the bill saying it did not flout the rules of the sitting.

"It has never happened in the Malaysian Parliament whereby an act is taken to court to be declared unconstitutional...after that there is a similar case (being tabled for amendment).

"(But) if a law is found at one time to be unconstitutional, Parliament can formulate another law (to replace the earlier law)," he said.

As such, he said to ensure the debate on the bill did not flout Standing Order 36(2), he personally would monitor the debates so that they would not directly discuss cases which had been referred to the court.

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