

## **Najib Inaugurates Court To Handle Child Sexual Crimes**

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PUTRAJAYA, June 22 (Bernama) --Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today inaugurated a special court to handle sexual crimes against children, the first such court in Southeast Asia.

The existence of the court would help expedite cases related to sexual crimes against children, he said at the inauguration at the Palace of Justice here.

He said the court would focus on cases such as pornography, child grooming and child sexual assault in accordance with the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 which would be enforced soon, and the first case was expected to be heard by the court on July 4.

Najib suggested that special Standard Operating Procedures be drawn up soon to handle cases of sexual offences against children.

"The special guidelines to be developed should meet the needs and requirements of child witnesses and be in accordance with the best practices in other countries," he said.

Najib's wife Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, who is patron of the Permata Programmes; Chief Justice Tan Sri Md Raus Sharif; Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said were also present at the event.

The Prime Minister said a working committee comprising the courts, the Attorney General's Chambers, the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry and several NGOs for children as well as UNICEF should be set up to draw up the special guidelines.

He expressed the hope that the existence of the court would help expedite cases of sexual crimes against children, perhaps resolving them in less than a year instead of several years as was the case now.

"If we are to observe, the situation in cases involving children is unique. For example, in the case of a child who faces sexual abuse at the age of 16 and the case prolongs until the child is 18 and becomes an adult, the feeling to adduce evidence dissipates. As such, it is of significance to expedite the hearing and resolve the case," he said.

Najib said that for a start, the special court at the Palace of Justice would hear cases that took place in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya.

"InsyaAllah (God willing), we will inaugurate similar courts in stages in all the 13 states in the country," he added.

The special court would be conducted by a senior judge of the Sessions Court and it would have prosecutors with special experience in handling sexual crimes involving children, he said.

"The establishment of this special court has also taken into account the need for a suitable and friendly environment with facilities for the child witnesses," he said.

He said the setting up of this special court was seen as an essential component in line with the implementation of the Sexual Offences Against Children Act.

Najib said the Judicial and Legal Training Institute (ILKAP), in collaboration with the Attorney General's Chambers, the courts, the Bar Council and NGOs, would carry out capacity building, training and courses for the judges and DPPs who would handle the cases.

Meanwhile, Md Raus said 56 existing cases at the Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam and Petaling Jaya sessions courts would be brought to the special court.

He also said that a former judge of the Klang Sessions Court had been appointed to hear cases at the special court, and the first case to be heard on July 4 involved rape.

"The performance of this special court will be constantly monitored. I hope all involved would extend their undivided cooperation to ensure that the objective of setting up this special court is achieved," he said.

Md Raus said there were plans to have similar special courts in Johor, Penang and Selangor at the end of this year or next year.

He said a study would be conducted based on the statistics of the reported sexual crimes against children to identify the needs of the other states.

Asked whether the media would be allowed to follow the proceedings of the special court, Md Raus said that would depend on the judge.

However, the media would not be allowed into the room for child witnesses, he added.

"If the judge declares that it is a closed court, then you (the media) must leave. Other than that, it is a normal court and you can cover the proceedings," he said.

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