

Special Court for child sexual crimes launched

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By Aedi Asri

Prime Minister Najib Razak hopes creation of the court will speed up trials which are now sometimes delayed for years.

PUTRAJAYA: The Special Court to deal with sexual crimes against children was launched today, just two months after legislation to establish it was passed by Parliament.

In launching it at the Palace of Justice here, Prime Minister Najib Razak said the court was the first of its kind to be set up in Southeast Asia.

“This court will speed up and smoothen all proceedings and trials of sexual crimes involving children.

“With the creation of this court, I hope cases of this nature can now be settled no later than a year compared with the current situation when they sometimes stretch into years,” he added.

The Special Court is set up under the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 which also provides imprisonment for a maximum of 30 years, a fine of up to RM20,000, plus a minimum of six lashes of the cane.

The offences in the law cover child pornography, child grooming, physical and non-physical sexual violation, people in positions of trust or authority (such as family members and teachers) who are involved in or abet the crime, and placing child witnesses under duress.

Najib urged for the speedy establishment of a working committee to draft special guidelines to handle sexual crimes against children.

He said committee members should be drawn from the courts, Attorney-General’s Chambers, ministry of women, family and community development as well as relevant NGOs.

“The guidelines should fulfil the wishes and needs of child witnesses as well as be in line with global best practices,” he said.

Najib was later briefed on the operation of the Special Court. He also inspected the witness room, specially designed by those from Permata, an early childhood educational programme.

Meanwhile, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Azalina Othman Said revealed that similar special courts would be set up in other states, starting with Selangor, Penang and Johor.

She said the three states were given priority based on the number of recorded child sexual crimes recorded there.

Asked whether the law would be amended to further strengthen it, she said the working committee would examine the need to do so.

"We will monitor all cases and scrutinise the effectiveness of the provisions — what is inadequate or the existence of loopholes – before we consider any amendments," she added.

Police statistics over a two-year period – 2015 to end 2016 – show 2,759 cases of rape, 412 cases of incest, 1,423 cases of molest and 422 cases of unnatural sex involving victims below 18 years of age, had been committed.

"It is hoped that with the creation of this court, sexual offenders out there will become more fearful ... they won't get away," said Azalina.

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