

FIRST IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

SWIFT JUSTICE FOR CHILD SEX CRIME VICTIMS

There should be no delay in handling cases, say Najib and chief justice

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A SPECIAL court that deals with sexual crimes against children, the first of its kind in Southeast Asia, was launched to ensure swift justice is done.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday said there should not be any delay in handling sexual crime cases when the victims were children.

"I hope with the set up of this court, sexual crime cases against children can be settled fast, if possible within one year compared with some cases being dragged for several years," he said of the court, which will see its first proceeding on July 4.

"Frivolous postponement (of cases) should not be allowed.

Judges should not allow such postponement to occur; the Bar Council should discipline its members and the prosecution should send officers who are efficient and dedicated," he said at the launch of the court at the Palace of Justice here.

Present were the prime minister's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, Chief Justice Tan Sri Md Raus Sharif, and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said.

"The special court here will hear cases in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya. God willing, we will set up this (special) court in all states in stages," said Najib.

Raus said more of such special courts would be set up, with focus on Johor, Selangor and Penang, followed by the east coast states.

"Once we have the special court, we will make sure that these cases are dealt with quickly within one year.

"I have suggested it to be done in nine months, but there are views that it will put too much pressure. So I say, try not more than one year and if it can be done in nine months, that will be



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, at the special court for child sexual crimes at the Palace of Justice in Putrajaya yesterday. With them are Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said and Chief Justice Tan Sri Md Raus Sharif. PIC BY AHMAD IRHAM MOHD NOOR

good," said the chief justice.

Raus added that 56 existing cases of various sexual offences under the existing laws would be transferred to the special court after the Hari Raya celebration.

The special court will focus on cases such as child pornography, child grooming and child sexual assault in tandem with the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 that would be enforced soon.

The prime minister also suggested the formation of special standard operating procedures (SOPs) as guidelines on how best to handle sexual crime cases involving children. He hoped the SOPs could be drafted as soon as possible.

To achieve this, he said, a working committee, comprising the court, the Attorney-General's Chambers, and the Women, Family and Community Development Ministry, as well as non-governmental organisations, including

the United Nations Children's Fund, would be formed.

Najib also said child victims of sexual crimes should be handled with sensitivity to ensure they would not experience psychological and emotional trauma.

To ensure efforts in tackling sexual crimes against children are successful, Najib wanted all quarters to give full support to the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017.

The court's establishment was mooted by the prime minister, who had raised it during a seminar on sexual crimes against children in March.

Aimed at fast-tracking the disposal of cases as well as hearing proceedings, Sessions Court judges with expertise in laws relating to children would be appointed to hear cases.

Sessions Court judge Yong Zarida Sazali, with 25 years of service, has been appointed to

hear cases in the special court located at the Annexe building of the Palace of Justice.

It is equipped with infrastructure such as court recording transcription; a waiting room for child witnesses; live video link; child witness screens and disabled-friendly facilities.

Rosmah, who is also the Permatata Foundation patron, later officiated the waiting room for vulnerable witnesses, called the "Bilik Permatata", which Permatata had equipped with child-friendly facilities.

Based on Welfare Department statistics, 5,779 cases of sexual abuse against children were recorded from 2010 until 2015, with an average of 963 cases a year, while police recorded 2,759 rape cases, incest (412 cases), molest (1,423 cases) and unnatural sex (422 cases) between 2015 and last year involving victims aged 18 and below.