



Better protection: Rohani opening the Kafe@Teen centre that allows teenagers to spend their time on various healthy activities. — Bernama

Come down hard on those who say nothing

Rohani: Those who remain silent are abetting the crime

PUTRAJAYA: The new law to protect children from sexual predators must come down hard on those who stay silent despite knowing a child close to them is being abused, says Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Rohani Abdul Karim.

She said the authorities must go after and punish people who would rather save face through their silence, than protect the children in their care.

Under the Sexual Offences Against Children Bill 2017, those who fail to inform or abet in cases of abuse, including enforcement officers, would be punished with a fine of up to RM5,000.

"In 80% of the cases, abusers were people who know the victims' fathers, uncles or neighbours, not just foreigners like Richard Huckle," she said, referring to the British man convicted of crimes against children in Malaysia while working as a social worker here between March 2006 and December 2014.

She said this showed that family members often knew about

the abuses, and by not coming forward, had essentially abetted in the crime.

Rohani said the Bill would hold responsible not just immediate family members, but also teachers and counsellors that the children might have turned to.

"A lot of cases were thrown out due to lack of evidence. This makes witness testimony especially important if a child is too young and unable to speak for themselves," she told a press conference here after launching the Kafe@Teen centre.

"I don't want Malaysia to be known as a *syurga* (heaven) for paedophilia," she said.

Asked if action against family members would cause more damage, she said abusing a child was even more damaging.

"First and foremost it's meant as a deterrent and to show that the ministry is serious in dealing with such people. Hopefully it won't be necessary to punish the whole family," she said.

The Bill was tabled in Parliament on March 28 and is expected to be debated at its second reading today.