

Hisham shoots down calls to withdraw Assembly Bill

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by Hazlan Zakaria

The government will not entertain calls to withdraw the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said today.

Asked by reporters if he would agree with calls to withdraw the Bill, which was tabled for the first reading on Tuesday, Hishammuddin (right) emphatically replied in the negative.

"No," he asserted, adding that it was premature for the opposition to speak out against the Bill prior to it even being debated in Parliament.

The matter, he said, was being used by the opposition for political mileage.

Hishammuddin also denied that the Bill, scheduled to be debated today, would be restrictive to the public and gives the police wider powers than current provisions controlling public assemblies under the soon-to-be repealed Section 27 of the Police Act.

Police now 'facilitates' assemblies

The government will continue to proceed with implementing the proposed legislation, he added.

He was speaking to reporters at Parliament House today after Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak (left) tabled a motion to repeal three Emergency proclamations.

In his speech when tabling the motion earlier, the prime minister also touched upon the call from the opposition to withdraw the Bill.

Najib argued that the bill transforms the police from being the source of permission for public assemblies, to facilitator of constitutionally guaranteed rights.

"The opposition has accused the bill as choking the public's right to assemble. Is this true?"

"No!" he said in reply to his own question.

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