

Debates on Assembly Bill to begin Tuesday

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Prime Minister Najib Razak has tabled the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011 for its second reading in the Dewan Rakyat amidst opposition calls and a demonstration outside Parliament House today itself, for its withdrawal.

However, the debate for the proposed law which was tabled for first reading on Tuesday, will be next Tuesday.

Najib (left), in his speech, said that the Bill, which serves as an extension of the to-be-repealed Section 27 of the Police Act, was drafted based on similar laws in Australia, Germany, Finland and the United Kingdom, among others.

He rationalised that the Bill is in tandem with Article 10 of the federal constitution, and at the same time to put an end to street demonstrations.

The Bill was crafted to fill in the void left explained by constitution on the "rights of other", in restricting assemblies, said Najib, adding that it does not explain:

- 1) The right to enjoy property in peace
- 2) The right to freedom of movement
- 3) The right to enjoy nature
- 4) The right to conduct business

"The Peaceful Assembly Bill is to supervise assemblies that are held in public spaces, whether static or moving.

"The Bill is to ensure that every citizen has the right to organise or participate in assemblies, peacefully and without arms.

"This right is subjected to restrictions which are needed and expedient to a democratic society for the sake of safety, public order and the rights of other," said Najib.

He reiterated that sections in the Bill that state - no protests in or anywhere in a 50-metre buffer zone around prohibited areas defined in a list, which include hospitals, schools and places of worship, are in place to ensure the rights of others are not contravened.

The debate had been initially scheduled for Nov 24, 29 and 30 and Dec 1.

Parliament will stand down for the weekend as well as the Awal Muharram national holiday on Monday next week.

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