

**Pakatan stands by call for Assembly Bill withdrawal**  
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**by Aidila Razak**

Pakatan Rakyat MPs today said they will continue to vote against the Peaceful Assembly Bill scheduled to be debated in Parliament next week, notwithstanding amendments to the draft law.

Speaking on the sidelines of the PKR Congress in Johor, Machang MP Saifuddin Nasution said that PKR stands by Pakatan Rakyat's decision to call for the Bill's withdrawal.

"Our official stand, made during the Pakatan presidential meeting last week, is clear. The bill should be withdrawn, not for amendments to be made here and there," he said.

Yesterday, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Abdul Aziz had reportedly said that the government will amend several sections in the Bill, including reducing the days for advanced notice from 30 days to 10 days.

Other amendments include:

Police to inform of their decision to organisers within 24 hours of notice, down from 48 hours in the present Bill

Organisers can appeal to the minister within 48 hours, compared to six days in the present Bill

Dropping the word "discontent" in several sections of the Bill

Saifuddin said that even with the amendments, the Bill contravenes freedoms guaranteed by the constitution, particularly as the blanket ban on street demonstrations remain.

"This shows the government is not prepared to move beyond their traditional ways stifling dissent," he said.

Spirit, philosophy rejected

Saifuddin urged Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to return to the premise of his Malaysia Day announcement, when he promised to allow greater democratic space.

"The PM must be honest to honour his Malaysia Day pledge, as the premise of this promise was the realisation that Malaysians are more matured," he said.

Agreeing with him, DAP MP for Bukit Bendera Liew Chin Tong said that fundamentally, the Bill does not "base itself on human rights principles" and is a "product of the Cold War mentality."

"We reject (the Bill's) philosophy. If the government still goes on (in) the spirit of control that is fine. We know we cannot change the BN.

"But if the government wants to compare itself to despots, please do so with, (countries) other than Burma," he said when contacted.

The role of the police should merely be as facilitator for public expression, "or else (the Bill) will be meaningless," said Liew.

The Burmese Parliament last week passed a similar bill, allowing street demonstrations but making it conditional that permits are applied for five days in advance.

Gombak MP Azmin Ali added that the government must consult with civil society, which has come forward strongly against the Bill.

"The government must engage with all interest groups like the Bar Council, review recommendations by the Human Rights Council (Suhakam), human rights watch groups and Pakatan Rakyat," he said.

Lawyers, with support from the Bar Council will walk in protest of the Bill, before handing over a memorandum to the government in Parliament next week.

Yesterday, hundreds showed up at KLCC to in peaceful protest over the provisions of the Bill.

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