

PM clarifies 'confusion' over peaceful assembly act

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by Nigel Aw

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak today shot down claims that the mooted Peaceful Assembly Act is draconian, clarifying that gatherings can in fact be held on a short notice, contrary to criticisms otherwise about the bill.

"The Peaceful Assembly Act is divided into two categories, for designated areas, they only need to inform the police and there will be people to supervise even if it's on a short notice.

"For non-designated areas, then it will require a 10-day period so the police can negotiate with the local community to get their views," he said at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today.

"For designated areas, you can gather at any time... just inform the police you are having the gathering... in fact (you can) even inform within (just) 24 hours."

The premier added that this was a big change compared to the present law.

"Police has discretion (previously) but in this new act, the right of citizens to gather peacefully is guaranteed, so this is important," he said.

Najib also rubbished claims that the law was more draconian than Burma, accusing opponents of trying to confuse the public.

"We will define the areas where the people can gather. They will be designated. That is what we mean designated area, and they will be areas that will not impede public interest such as stadiums and open spaces.

"The police will just facilitate the peaceful gathering, that is the role of the police."

'Still no street demonstrations'

When asked whether similar rules would apply to street demonstrations, Najib was adamant that it was out of the question.

"Not for street demonstrations. We say no to street demonstrations. It's out. The point is, it will disrupt the peace and affect the livelihood of others."

He added that what was important was for citizens to have a platform to gather peacefully to voice their opinions.

"We have researched 12 different acts world wide and we tried to make an act that is consistent with (our norms) and international norms," he said.

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