

**Najib 'ill-advised' about Peaceful Assembly Bill**  
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**by Susan Loone**

A Penang Gerakan leader has risen to the challenge by PKR to make a stand against the Peaceful Assembly Bill, although he is not a member of Parliament.

His Barisan Nasional partners may disagree, but lawyer Baljit Singh described some provisions of the recently tabled Bill as a “hindrance” to freedom of assembly.

He criticised the 30 days notice to organise protests as a move to “frustrate” the true spirit of the proposed law, which was tabled by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak last week.

But Baljit (right) was quick to add that Najib’s intention to table the Bill was good, but the premier was surrounded by “clowns” who had ill-advised him.

“Whenever Najib sets out to propose reforms, he is ill-advised by those around him,” he added.

Baljit said the purpose of notification should not be to curtail freedom but to notify the police to enable the force to “protect” those who wish to rally.

“The police should then ensure that there should be no outsiders or violence during the protests,” said the state Gerakan legal and human rights bureau chief.

Police should ‘escort’ protesters

To clarify his point, Baljit cited examples of police duty during protests in places such as Hong Kong and the United Kingdom.

“In such countries, police escort the protesters, and do not harm them,” he said.

“Our police can do that, too. The force has experience in ‘escorting’, for example, the mat rempit rally in Penang recently,” he quipped. Baljit was responding to Batu PKR MP Tian Chua who recently called upon BN component party Gerakan to stay true to its manifesto and join their Pakatan Rakyat colleagues by taking a stand against the Bill.

The two Gerakan MPs - Gerik MP Tan Lian Hoe and Simpang Renggam MP Liang Teck Meng - have to speak their minds about the contentious Bill, which created an uproar among social activists.

While critics want the Bill scrapped, Najib has described it as “revolutionary”, but due to protests, the cabinet has ordered a review of the proposed Act, which will take place today.

‘No double standards’

Meanwhile, on the implementation of the Act when it is passed, Baljit said it should be “crystal clear and applied without double standards”.

“Let it apply to all people, let there be one country, one law. The problem arises when it is not applied across the board and there are complaints that police have acted unfairly to certain parties,” he added.

On PKR’s challenge, Baljit said the Bill should not be opposed just for the sake of opposing, and that the critics should attempt to provide solutions as well.

“Just like we (Gerakan) did when we gave Penang an ‘F’ grade, we also provided some solution on how the state can improve on the areas where it failed,” he said.

Baljit lamented that politics are so divided that one must either be “for or against” a certain policy or; that constructive criticisms is lacking, but senseless opposition abound.

“Whenever I raise an issue, I am often asked: Are you in BN or Pakatan? People seldom see the issue that needs to be addressed,” he said.

‘Protests are not bad’

He cited the example of his participation in the July 9 Bersih 2.0 rally for electoral reforms, where he was warned of party disciplinary action since the federal government had opposed the protest.

“I went there for the issue, not in favour of the protest as I know that Pakatan had a hand in it. But I went because I support the right to assembly,” he said.

“When I was planning to go, I was warned of disciplinary action but I went ahead because my party upholds the constitution, and the right to freedom of assembly,” he added.

“Now the government has admitted that they handled Bersih badly. Why is protest bad? It happened during the fight for the country’s independence. We were then united for a common objective,” he stressed.

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