

Lawyers march against Sedition Act
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Almost 1,000 protesters, mostly lawyers, marched to Parliament today against the Sedition Act 1948.

The protesters were seen milling about Padang Merbuk in the Kuala Lumpur city centre as early as 9.30am, and started their march at 11.40am after chanting slogans and hearing speeches by Bar Council representatives.

Among the prominent personalities present were Bar Council president Christopher Leong (right), former Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan, her successor Maria Chin Abdullah, Parti Sosialis Malaysia secretary-general S Arulchelvan, Himpunan Hijau chief Wong Tack, and opposition parliamentarians Teo Nie Ching, Nga Kor Ming, R Sivarasa, Ong Kian Ming and Gobind Singh Deo.

The protest was organised by the Bar Council, with the support of the Malaysian Bar, which overwhelmingly voted in favour of holding the protest during an emergency general meeting on Sept 19.

However, according to the Malaysian Bar's estimate 2,500 people joined the march.

Dubbed "Walk for Peace and Freedom", it is the fourth such protest held by the Bar Council in its 67-year history.

The last was in 2011 to oppose a bill that is now known as the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012.

A group of Orang Asli, dressed in traditional garments, and university students chanting for academic freedom, were also seen marching with the lawyers.

A small band – with guitar, didgeridoo, tambourine, and a small hand drum – played music while marching and at the sidewalk outside Parliament.

Police presence at the protest was light, mostly to direct traffic, with the help of Kuala Lumpur City Hall enforcement officers and the Bar Council's own rally marshals.

Rally and counter-rally

Upon reaching the parliament, 10 Bar Council representatives led by Leong met with Minister in Prime Minister's Department Mah Siew Keong, who received a memorandum from the protesters on behalf of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak

The temperature was a scorching 30 degrees Celsius, with little wind and scattered clouds.

Despite the heat, most of the lawyers were dressed in black jackets – their full court attire – and chanted slogans outside the parliament while waiting for their leaders to return.

“Long live the people! Abolish the Sedition Act!”, the protesters chanted, while carrying anti-Sedition Act banners and placards.

One particularly good-humoured placard read: “Bloody hell it’s hot. Abolish the Sedition Act and let’s go for ice cream.”

Representatives from journalist group Gerakan Media Marah (Geramm) were at the protest, along with a handful of off-duty journalists, following a call by the group to walk in solidarity with the lawyers.

Meanwhile a group of about 10 youths held a counter rally at the Bank Negara roundabout at the same time.

The group, with some wearing face masks, held placards with messages like 'Preserve Sedition Act'.

Protest is public feedback

At about 1pm, about an hour after entering Parliament, Leong emerged with his entourage to announce the protest a success.

“We have achieved what we have set out to do today, which is to convey our views on your behalf to the prime minister, via Minister Mah (Siew Keong),” he said, before thanking the participants for coming and the police for facilitating the protest.

Nevertheless, he vowed that the Bar Council will continue its campaign against the Sedition Act until it is abolished.

Leong repeated his speech at least three times, each time moving from one part of the crowd to another to address them via a megaphone.

Speaking to reporters later, Leong claimed that the number of lawyers who attended the protest number between 1,000 and 1,500, but is unsure how many non-lawyers participated.

Leong said that this walk is in response to the effort initiated by the prime minister to obtain public feedback on the abolition of the Sedition Act and its replacement.

He hoped the leader would remain steadfast and committed to his pledge and promise.

“As they say, ‘Janji Ditepati’ (Promise Fulfilled), so we hope that would be the case in this

occasion," he added.

The protesters dispersed peacefully at 1.15pm.

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