

Citizenship law changes: Rulers have final say – PM

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Wang Ping

Putrajaya has to incorporate the Conference of Rulers' views on planned constitutional amendments that will affect citizenship, said Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

In view of this, Anwar said his administration will explain the matter to MPs, some of whom have expressed disapproval over the bill.

"We will inform them because this was presented to the Conference of Rulers. There is a limit on what we can do after discussions (with the rulers).

"Any constitutional amendment that affects the issue of citizenship has to be cleared with the Conference of Rulers. (The rulers) have taken a certain position and we will have to honour that.

"I think we will need to explain to the backbenchers," he told the press in Putrajaya this morning.

In a cryptic X (formerly Twitter) post on Saturday, Ipoh Timor MP Howard Lee suggested that some government MPs were not supportive of the amendments.

"There will be some who are compelled to break whip in order not to break conscience," he wrote.

The bill has not been tabled but interest groups who attended government engagement sessions on it have been lobbying MPs to address weaknesses in the bill.

According to the Malaysian Citizenship Rights Alliance, the bill will have seven amendments to the Federal Constitution including two that aim to give Malaysian mothers the equal right to confer automatic citizenship on children born overseas.

However, the five other amendments were criticised because they will make it even more difficult for other groups - foundlings and children of permanent residents, among others - facing citizenship woes.

To pass the amendments, Anwar will need at least 148 MPs to vote in favour because constitutional amendment bills must be passed by at least two-thirds of the Dewan Rakyat.

Some MPs have suggested that amendments be split or decoupled into separate bills for the house to ensure the passage of some of the proposed amendments.

Failing to pass the bill will be a setback to the Anwar administration as both Pakatan Harapan and BN had promised in the 2022 election pledges to amend laws to allow Malaysian mothers who give birth abroad a pathway to seek citizenship for their children, in parity with fathers right to do so.

'Ask home minister'

On a related matter - when asked by reporters - Women, Family and Community Development Minister Nancy Shukri said it was best to refer the backbenchers' opposition to the home minister.

"I'm aware of our own restrictions in responding to this because it won't be fair to the Home Ministry if I were to give information that has yet to be fully realised.

Women, Family and Community Development Minister Nancy Shukri

"Besides, the matter has to be brought to the Conference of Rulers (for scrutiny)," she said.

Pressed further on the matter, Nancy reiterated it would not be fair, but

mentioned the opposing MPs may have their own justification for speaking out.

"But I cannot say much about it. I hope you understand that."

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