

URBAN RENEWAL BILL DEBATE POSTPONED

Any weaknesses can be corrected through amendments, instead of outright rejection, says PM

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Deliberations on the Urban Renewal Bill in the Dewan Rakyat were yesterday deferred to the next sitting scheduled for Oct 6 to Dec 4.

The postponement comes amid mounting resistance against the bill from opposition and government members of parliament.

Barisan Nasional deputy chairman Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan said the coalition's 30 MPs had called for the bill to be delayed and reviewed to enable broader engagement with stakeholders.

On Tuesday, the menteri besar of the four opposition-controlled states, calling themselves the State Government Four (SG4), also rejected the bill, warning that it could undermine state government autonomy.

The SG4 secretariat said the proposed law would have far-reaching implications for land ownership rights, the continuity of urban communities and the rights of residents.

The Urban Renewal Bill was first tabled in the Dewan Rakyat last Thursday by Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming.

The bill was due for its second reading yesterday after the Gig Workers Bill was passed.

Earlier yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim told lawmakers any perceived weaknesses in the bill should be corrected through amendments rather than used as grounds to reject it.

Speaking in the Dewan Rakyat during the Prime Minister's Question Time, he said those concerned about urban renewal should propose improvements to the bill instead of accusing the government of planning to seize people's homes.

"The threshold (of consent) can



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim showing pictures of dilapidated flats to opposition leader Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin (left) at the Parliament lobby yesterday. With them is Housing and Local Government Minister Nga Kor Ming (right). BERNAMA PIC

be discussed during the debate on the bill, but I want to share a personal experience," he said.

Anwar said he had seen a one-room unit in the Sri Perlis flats here in terrible condition, which housed two families, one with six children.

"Our responsibility is to find a way to redevelop such housing into three-bedroom units, at a minimum, for one family," he said, adding that while there might be weaknesses in the bill, the government would try to fix them.

He said what the government could not accept was being attacked without any constructive proposals.

Anwar also criticised attempts by certain groups to create the perception that the bill was intended to force out Malays from urban centres.

"I want to ask: since we took over the government, with DAP as part of it, which area have we handed over to non-Malays?"

Anwar said he would not allow Malays and Bumiputeras to be marginalised and would continue to defend their interests.

"Do not assume that this (the bill) is some strategy for the Chinese to seize Malay rights. I do not agree," he said.

Anwar said the bill was aimed at safeguarding Malays, particularly those living in cities, to ensure they were not left in poverty or displaced.

"Do not accuse us of sidelining or oppressing the Malays, that is not true. One of my responsibilities is to protect Malays in the cities. I do not want them to live

in destitution," he said.

Anwar also cited his experience in Tanjung Tokong, Penang, where urban renewal efforts were stalled for decades because a small number of households refused to relocate, leaving many Malay families stuck with dilapidated houses.

"In Tanjung Tokong, Malay families in the city centre were left in poverty. Negotiations dragged on for decades. Out of 200 families, 13 refused to move, and the whole project was delayed.

"When it was my turn, could I, a Malay leader from Penang, allow them to continue living in squalor? Yes, we had to compel the 13 families to relocate because the Malays could not be left to suffer."

He said the government was applying this principle in the bill.

Anwar also challenged Perikatan Nasional's record on affordable housing and urban redevelopment during its 33 months in power, contrasting it with the current government's initiatives under the bill.

"I want to ask: during those 33 months under PN, were there any proposals to build low-cost housing? Were there any housing projects?"

"Yes, proposals existed — I saw that the previous minister had similar ideas on urban renewal. And now they protest and oppose the bill.

"So which is it? If you agree but see weaknesses, then fix them. But do not oppose the bill outright."