

RALLY INVESTIGATIONS HALTED

PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY ACT TO BE AMENDED

Gatherings can now be held without getting venue owners' approval, says Anwar

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THE government has agreed to amend the Peaceful Assembly Act, removing the requirement for organisers to obtain approval from venue owners before holding public gatherings.

"This Section 11 of the Peaceful Assembly Act, which mandates obtaining the consent of the owner or occupant of the assembly location, will be amended and removed from the existing regulations," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said during the Prime Minister's Question Time in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday.

He was responding to a query from Kota Melaka member of parliament Khoo Poay Tiong.

Section 11 of the Act currently states that organisers of assemblies, excluding religious gatherings, funeral processions or those held at designated assembly areas, must obtain consent from the owner or occupant of the venue.

"Although this amendment will be implemented in the next parliamentary session, a moratorium has already been granted.

"This means the police will not

enforce the existing law and will allow five-day notifications instead, ensuring they can prepare for traffic and security management," Anwar said.

He said while the moratorium on the Act applied to assembly conditions, it did not remove the need for adherence to laws concerning crime and safety.

"Only peaceful assemblies are permitted, meaning laws concerning weapons or the presence of minors at such gatherings will still apply," he added.

Anwar also addressed recent exceptional cases of police intervention, describing them as "not reflective of the real situation".

"Since 2012, there have been 2,874 applications, with 2,827 approved. The rejected applications were due to my involvement.

"In 2021, there were 1,639 applications, with 1,606 approved.

"In 2022, 12,256 applications were submitted, with 12,123 approved. In 2024, out of 5,151 applications, 98.7 per cent were approved," he said.

In response to a supplementary question from Khoo on investigations into participants of the "Himpunan Rakyat Benci Rasuah" anti-graft rally and a hunger strike over the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (Sosma), Anwar confirmed that investigations into these protests had been halted.

Khoo had asked why 13 student protesters at the rally had been called in for police questioning, despite the government's stance on the Act.

"As a result, previous actions, including investigations into the



Student protesters at the 'Himpunan Rakyat Benci Rasuah' in Kuala Lumpur on Jan 25. FILE PIC

People's Gathering Against Corruption (Himpunan Rakyat Benci Rasuah), will be halted. Similarly, the hunger strike and protest against Sosma, that took place a few days ago, will not face any legal action.

"I guarantee that from now on, no approval will be required, except for notification or a five-day advance notice to the police.

"Flexibility will also be given regarding the venue, except for locations deemed as security-sensitive. I believe organisers will cooperate with police," Anwar said.

In response to another supplementary question from Khoo on whether the government would repeal Sosma, Anwar said the Act remained necessary.

"No country is exempt from the threat of terrorism. Such threats in Malaysia should not be taken lightly. There have been cases where police officers were shot dead. In such cases, strict and firm laws are necessary. No country in the world is without such laws."

However, he acknowledged Khoo's concerns, agreeing that the law's implementation must be clear and not misused for other issues, as experienced in the past with the Internal Security Act.

The anti-corruption coalition, Sekretariat Rakyat Benci Rasuah, has hailed Anwar's decision to amend the Peaceful Assembly Act and stop police investigations into an anti-graft rally it organised in January.

Rally coordinator Tobey Qi-Sean expressed his gratitude, calling it a major victory for Malaysians, particularly university students who participated in

the protest.

"Although there was intimidation by the police and ministers, in the end, this is a positive step for the government.

"This is a victory for the people of Malaysia. After years of Bersih protests and the government labelling protests as illegal assemblies, today marks a significant moment," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Khoo, who is Unity Government Backbenchers Club chairman, expressed confidence that the proposed amendments would not compromise public peace and order.

He said the government's readiness to amend the Act reflected its commitment to upholding the right to assemble under the Madani administration.

"Organisers will still be required to submit a notice before holding an assembly so that police have sufficient time to prepare security measures," he told reporters at the Parliament building yesterday.

Unity Government Backbenchers Club secretary Syed Ibrahim Syed Noh, in welcoming the move, said the right to assemble had long been a fundamental cause championed by his party.

"We hope this will foster a more vibrant democratic atmosphere. While we do not want to expose the public to security threats, we must strike a balance between security and freedom," he said.

Pulai MP Suhaizan Kaiat called it a positive step in reassuring both citizens and the international community that Malaysia upheld the right to peaceful assembly and free expression.