

Let the people assemble

Anwar: Venue approval rule for peaceful assemblies to be scrapped

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KUALA LUMPUR: Plans to amend the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 (Act 736) will, among others, include removing the requirement to obtain venue approval, which is currently a must for those who wish to organise peaceful assemblies, says Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

The Prime Minister said this requirement, which is currently a point of contention, will be removed from the regulations.

The organisers will still need to notify the police five days in advance so they can manage and ensure security, crowd control and traffic management, he added.

"Section 11 of the Act, requiring obtaining approval from the owner or occupier of the place will be removed from the rules.

"With this (amendment) several previous actions, including the investigation into the anti-corruption rally involving university students, will be halted and no action will be taken.

"The same will apply to the recent hunger strike and protest by families of detainees under the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act (Sosma), no action will be taken against them," he said during the Prime Minister's Question Time.

Responding to Khoo Poay Tiong (PH-Kota Melaka), the Prime Minister said amendment to the Act will be tabled in the next Dewan Rakyat sitting.

Khoo had asked whether the government is prepared to amend the Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 to allow citizens to gather peacefully without needing prior approval from the relevant authorities.

Anwar said Sosma is still needed for authorities to act on activities such as terrorism, add-

ing that the Act should be in force as they are not to be taken lightly

"Our country is not exempted from terrorism attacks so we cannot these threats lightly," he said.

At the parliament's media centre, Khoo who is also the Government Backbenchers Club deputy chair, welcomed the government's decision to amend the Peaceful Assembly Act.

"We see it as an institutional reform carried out by the government under the leadership of the Prime Minister," he said.

"We also welcome the assurance that no investigation will be continued against the 13 students who participated in the anti-corruption rally recently."

Syed Ibrahim Syed Noh (PH-Ledang) also welcomed the announcement, saying that he had also participated in previous protests.

"These are the basic rights that we fought for and because of that, we continued to champion

it," he said.

He expressed hope that with the amendments, it will make it easier to revitalise democracy in the country, without compromising other threats.

Suhaizan Kaiat (PH-Pulai) supported this positive development, adding that it would give more freedom for the people to assemble.

"It is not easy for premises to give their approval, and some even had been influenced by the authorities or certain parties to stop them from giving their approval.

"If the people want to assemble, there must be a legitimate reason, so we have to give the largest space to them," he added.