

**Peaceful Assembly Bill Not 'Draconian', Guarantees Right Of Citizens - Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today dismissed allegations by certain quarters that the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011 was a more draconian legislation compared to previous laws.

He emphasised that the bill, which was tabled in parliament last week, actually guaranteed the right of every Malaysian citizen to assemble in a peaceful manner.

Under the act, organisers of such assemblies at designated places are just required to give a short notice at any time to the police, who would then facilitate the assembly, he said.

"The important thing is that the new act guarantees the right of the citizen to assemble in a peaceful manner. It is a totally baseless claim that our laws are more draconian than Myanmar's and all kinds of rubbish they're saying. These people are out to confuse the public," Najib asserted during a press conference after declaring open the an international forum in conjunction with the 2011 Umno General Assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre, here.

He was commenting on allegations by certain quarters which claimed that the bill, which is being debated in the Dewan Rakyat currently, is worse than what was practised in Myanmar and restricted the rights and freedom of expression of Malaysians.

On Nov 22, Najib tabled the Peaceful Assembly Bill in Parliament, which not only covered the rights of organisers and participants to conduct and participate in peaceful assemblies without arms but also took into consideration the interests of the public.

The Umno president also ticked off the opposition for misinterpreting the bill, in particular, about the 30-day notice period.

"In fact, the phrase used was 'within 30 days', it could be in five or 10 days but because the phrase created confusion, we decided to be more specific and fixed it to 10 days, so it's clear now," he said.

He said this requirement was for non-designated places only, so police could get the views of the surrounding community.

Questioned on the designated places, Najib said the government has made a list which included stadiums and open areas, while hospitals were excluded.

The prime minister said the new legislation is actually much better and a big change to the existing laws, which gives the police the power to decide.

He explained that 12 similar acts of other countries were reviewed before the bill was drafted and it also conformed to international norms.

"Most importantly, we want to assemble, we want to voice our opinion. We can assemble in a peaceful manner and this is based on international norms because we have studied 12

other acts practised by countries around the world," he said.

Street demonstrations are definitely not allowed as it inconveniences the public, he added.

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