

Assembly law sails through Dewan Negara
The Malaysian Insider
December 20, 2011

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 20 — The Peaceful Assembly Bill sailed through Dewan Negara today as expected, despite a last-gasp plea by the Bar Council for the controversial law to be rejected.

Thirty-nine senators gave the Bill tabled by Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Liew Vui Keong their approval, as opposed to eight votes against.

Earlier this morning, the Bar Council launched its final attempt to block the Bill's passing by pleading with lawmakers not to put "blind obedience to party and partisanship".

In an open letter to Dewan Negara senators today, council president Lim Chee Wee reminded the group of their duties as "servants to the people", insisting that the proposed law would infringe on Malaysians' rights as guaranteed under the Federal Constitution.

The Bill was previously pushed through Dewan Rakyat solely on Barisan Nasional lawmakers' votes, after opposition MPs walked out en masse.

The Peaceful Assembly Bill was introduced by Datuk Seri Najib Razak as part of his reforms drive to provide Malaysians with greater liberties.

But the law quickly drew criticism from a host of critics, ranging from Pakatan Rakyat lawmakers and lawyers to an inter-faith association and human rights groups.

Among others, detractors have called the proposed law more repressive than existing assembly laws, a breach of human rights, and restrictive towards religious freedom.

PAS recently applied for judicial review of the Bill, but its bid was promptly thrown out by the High Court for "being an abuse of the court process."

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