

Najib to table Freedom of Assembly bill this week
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 20 — Putrajaya will table a new bill in Parliament this week to regulate public gatherings as pledged by Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

The prime minister had promised a raft of reforms in his Malaysia Day address which included repealing Section 27 of the Police Act to do away with police permits for mass assemblies other than street protests.

But the new law, likely to be called the Freedom of Assembly Act, will require the “collaboration” of various parties before a public gathering can be held.

The Malaysian Insider understands the tabling of the new law was discussed in last Friday’s Cabinet meeting.

“The law will outline when and where a gathering or march can be held. For example, it can only be held on weekends or certain days in specific areas so public order is not disturbed,” a source told The Malaysian Insider.

There were also suggestions that public assemblies only be allowed in specific venues such as stadiums.

The Malaysian Insider understands that the bill will mirror other freedom of assembly laws used in developed countries such as Britain (Public Order Act) and Finland (Assembly Act).

Najib is expected to table the bill as soon as Budget 2012 is passed. Debate on the supply bill is scheduled to be completed on Wednesday.

“I understand Datuk Seri Najib will table for first reading on Thursday, as long as there are no changes, another law regarding the political transformation he announced in September,” an MP told The Malaysian Insider.

Lim Chee Wee (picture) also confirmed that the Bar Council was invited to discuss the drafting of the law.

The new law was drafted as a consequence to repeal Section 27 of the Police Act, the Bar president said when contacted by The Malaysian Insider.

Najib made his September 15 announcement, which included the repeal of the controversial Internal Security Act (ISA) and doing away with annual permits for the print media, saying he wanted to give Malaysians more freedom.

The prime minister said the government will review Section 27 of the Police Act by taking into account Article 10 of the Federal Constitution that relates to freedom of assembly.

He said the government will allow public gatherings based on international norms while taking a firm stand against street demonstrations.

The Restricted Residence and Banishment Act were already repealed last month while Najib has said the repeal of the ISA will take place in March after two replacement laws have been drafted.

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