

Bar Council wary of Najib's pledge to reform
The Malaysian Insider
November 24, 2011
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 24 — The Bar Council chided today Datuk Seri Najib Razak for breaking his Malaysia Day pledge to legal reform, saying his haste to pass the flawed assembly law rendered meaningless the government's constitutional guarantee.

In a statement today, Malaysian Bar president Lim Chee Wee questioned the ruling Barisan Nasional administration's haste in pushing through the proposed law without sufficient public consultation.

"These restrictive provisions in the [Peaceful Assembly] Bill effectively render meaningless our constitutional guarantee, by constraining assembly to very limited circumstances," Lim said.

Citing Najib, Lim (picture) said: "The era in which the government knows everything and claims monopoly over wisdom... Be confident that it is a strength and not a weakness for us to place our trust in the Malaysian people's intelligence to make decisions that will shape the path of their own future."

The head of the country's biggest legal society urged Najib to prove his sincerity to government reform by referring the proposed assembly law to a Parliamentary select committee and get further feedback from the public before passing it.

Lim noted the "Malaysian Bar is now wary as to the form and substance of the two proposed pieces of legislation that will replace the Internal Security Act 1960, given this disappointing experience."

The prime minister promised a raft of reforms in his Malaysia Day address on September 15, including 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.

Najib had earlier today rubbished accusations from opposition Pakatan Rakyat lawmakers and several other civil society groups who labeled the hastily-drafted law as repressive.

Instead, he defended the government proposal as "revolutionary".

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