

Bersih: Assembly law changes another Najib 'flip-flop'
The Malaysian Insider
November 26, 2011
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 26 — Bersih leaders have criticised the Najib administration for not putting enough thought into the Peaceful Assembly Bill after the government said it will amend several sections in the proposed law following opposition from civil rights groups.

Calling it yet another "flip-flop" by the prime minister, Bersih deputy chairman Maria Chin Abdullah said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak should not have disregarded the wishes of the people before tabling the Bill earlier this week.

"He does this all the time. First, he says yes, yes, yes, and then after that (no, no, no)," she told The Malaysian Insider.

Maria lamented that that Najib had fallen short of his Malaysia Day pledge to allow greater freedoms, pointing out that the prime minister had similarly reneged on his promise to stop using the Internal Security Act (ISA).

"We are actually in the process of seeing the ISA taken out... and then suddenly, they arrest 11 persons under ISA.

"What on earth is going on? I think if he continues in the manner... there will be some strong reaction (from the people)," she said.

Bersih steering committee member Wong Chin Huat said the government should scrap the "fundamentally flawed" Bill altogether rather than try to amend portions of it.

He likened the Peaceful Assembly Bill to milk powder laced with heavy metals and said it was unacceptable for Putrajaya to merely attempt to reduce the level of contamination.

"No, that won't work. You have to throw it away... It's so shameful that Najib should rethink the whole thing," he said.

The government need only amend the Police Act to allow freedom of assembly, Wong said, adding that if the authorities wished to implement other changes, the consultation process would have to start anew.

Putrajaya has agreed to amend seven sections in the Peaceful Assembly Bill following nationwide protests criticising it as more repressive than current laws.

According to Star Online, de facto law minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz confirmed today that the Cabinet had reached the decision during its meeting yesterday.

Nazri said the Cabinet decided to amend the Bill following protests from civil rights groups and opposition lawmakers.

Among others, he said the 30-day advance notice to hold an assembly will be shortened to 10 days.

The provision has been criticised by civil society groups and opposition lawmakers as restrictive, particularly after Myanmar, known for its poor human rights record, passed a similar law earlier this week stipulating only five days' notice to hold a protest.

The Peaceful Assembly Bill was mooted by the Najib administration as part of its Malaysia Day promises to foster greater democracy and promote civil liberties.

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