

Go full distance with reforms, Ambiga tells Najib
The Malaysian Insider
September 19, 2011
By Melissa Chi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 19 — Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan today urged the prime minister to include street demonstrations and a complete dismantling of newspaper licensing laws in his reforms pledge, saying changes mooted now were still “not satisfactory”.

“The announcement on the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) in my view is not satisfactory because as long as the power still rests in the Home Minister to revoke licences, there is no difference whether it is a yearly licence or whether you give a licence that can be revoked,” the Bersih 2.0 chairman told reporters after a court hearing to challenge the ban on the electoral reforms movement today.

Ambiga also pointed out the inconsistency of government policy in maintaining a ban on public protests while amending the laws to cater for the constitutional right to assembly.

“On the one hand, they say they uphold the principle of the freedom of assembly, [but] on the other hand, they say they don’t allow street protests. That is a contradiction in terms.

“Peaceful street demonstrations are part and parcel of freedom of assembly,” she said, adding that the prime minister should look to international norms as mentioned in his speech last Thursday.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced a slew of reforms to press and security laws, including the repeal of the Internal Security Act and the lifting of three Emergency declarations, saying that the move to increase civil liberties was “risky, but we are doing this for our survival.”

As part of the reforms, the government will do away with the annual renewal of newspaper licences and introduce one-off permits that can be revoked if regulations are flouted.

Najib also announced plans to amend the Police Act to allow for freedom of assembly according to international norms, although street protests would still be outlawed.

Najib and Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein have said that the ISA along with three Emergency Declarations would be repealed when both the Dewan Negara and Dewan Rakyat have their next sitting.

However, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz said later that there would not be enough time to repeal the ISA when Parliament next meets in October and that the draft replacement laws would be tabled during the next sitting in March.

“We need to see the new legislation. I’m not sure why we need two legislations to replace the ISA,” Ambiga said today, adding that Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) should be consulted as they had drafted a legislation to substitute the draconian law.

Ambiga also said she was convinced these changes could come as early as the next parliamentary sitting..

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