

**Dewan Rakyat Passes Peaceful Assembly Bill
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 29 (Bernama) -- The Dewan Rakyat passed the Peaceful Assembly Bill 2011 Tuesday after allowing six amendments, but the opposition MPs staged a walkout and did not vote.

The bill was tabled for second reading by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak on Nov 24. It was tabled for first reading on Nov 22 by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz.

The bill seeks to enable citizens to organise and participate in peaceful assemblies without arms with the necessary restrictions to maintain peace and public order.

During the debate, the opposition MPs led by Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim asked the government to withdraw the bill and have a parliamentary select committee review it.

One of the amendments, involving Clause 9(1), allows organisers of assemblies to notify the police only 10 days before the event and not 30 days as in the original bill.

Clause 12(1) was amended to shorten from 48 hours to 24 hours the period for the police to respond to the organisers' notification of an assembly.

Clause 12(2) was also amended to shorten from five days to 24 hours the period for the vested party to make an objection to the police over the notice of assembly.

The period for the police to respond to the objection was also shortened, from 12 days to five days, as per an amendment to Clause 14.

An amendment to Clause 15 enables the police to impose restrictions on various aspects of the assembly, including the time and place, to maintain safety and public order to safeguard the rights of others.

Clause 16 was amended to shorten the period of appeal by the organisers to the minister.

When winding up debate, Mohamed Nazri said the bill did not contravene the Federal Constitution as it provided an impetus to Article 10 of the constitution by allowing the freedom to assembly without arms.

He referred to the Bar Council handing over a memorandum of protest against the bill at Parliament House and said the Bar Council had notified the police of their peaceful assembly.

"The Bar Council does not agree with the notification. But, surprisingly, they had notified the police before gathering this morning.

"If they are not happy with the notice, then why did they notify the police before the gathering? It means they want police protection in the event there is provocation by other

groups," he said.

Mohamed Nazri said the requirement for a 30-day notice had been amended to 10 days, reflecting that the government listened to the people's views.

He said the opposition would blame the government of being cruel if it did not listen to the people.

"If we do so, they will twist the story and say something else to the people," he said.

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