

Kit Siang suggests Malaysia copy Myanmar's assembly law

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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 25 — Lim Kit Siang told the government today to send Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein to Myanmar to learn about fundamental liberties, after human rights activists suggested earlier that Yangon's new law on public demonstrations gave its citizens more freedom than Malaysia's own version.

Mocking the Najib administration's Peaceful Assembly Bill tabled this week in Parliament, the veteran DAP politician said Malaysia should copy the Myanmar legislation.

"It was however mortifying and shameful that Malaysia has to learn from a country known for its poor human rights record.

"Does Najib want to send the Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein to Myanmar to learn to be more respectful of the fundamental liberties at least with regard to freedom of assembly for the respective citizenry?" Lim (picture) said in a statement today.

"I thought the day will never come for me to say this — the Malaysian prime minister and Cabinet should learn from Myanmar at least on freedom of peaceful protest and assembly."

Earlier today, Bersih 2.0 chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan said Malaysians will have less freedom under the government's proposed new law governing public demonstrations compared to Myanmar, a country which has one of the world's worst human rights record.

She pointed out that Myanmar recently passed new legislation that allowed street protests, and provided for less stringent conditions than the Najib administration's proposed Peaceful Assembly Act.

Myanmar's military-dominated Parliament passed a law this week allowing citizens to protest peacefully but which requires demonstrators to "inform the authorities five days in advance.

Under Malaysia's Peaceful Assembly Act, demonstrators are required to give 30 days' notice to the police, while a host of restrictions effectively prevents any street protests.

The Myanmar law states that demonstrators must avoid government buildings, schools, hospitals and embassies. The Malaysian version has similar restrictions but includes a buffer from houses of worship and petrol stations.

Lim said that despite Myanmar's reputation, its military-dominated government had approved the Peaceful Gathering and Procession Bill yesterday.

"Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak must be at a loss for words," Lim said.

"Myanmar has always been regarded as the worst laggard country in Asean in its utter disregard and contempt for human rights," he pointed out.

Najib, in defending the new assembly law yesterday, had described it as "revolutionary" and

a giant leap towards improving individual freedom.

But civil society group and lawmakers are strongly against the Bill, claiming it was more repressive in nature than current laws, and want the administration to withdraw it from Parliament.

Lim said Malaysia's proposed law contradicts Najib's intention to turn the country into the "best democracy in the world" as it appeared to be more restrictive than section 27 of the Police Act.

The Peaceful Assembly Bill was introduced to replace section 27 of the Police Act as part of Najib's raft of reforms promised during his Malaysia Day message in September.

Lim said that although Malaysia's assembly law was patterned after the Queensland Peaceful Assembly Act 1992, it included additional provisions that grant the police powers to arbitrarily restrict the right to free assembly.

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