

Amendments show Cabinet committed to real reform, says BN man
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 26 — Barisan Nasional's (BN) Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah defended today the Najib Cabinet's decision to amend the controversial Peaceful Assembly Bill, saying it showed the government is working towards real democratic reform.

The higher education deputy minister told The Malaysian Insider in a text message that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak is committed to creating a mature democracy and had very progressive ideas and noble intentions when he mooted the proposed law.

But the vocal Saifuddin (picture), who is usually unafraid to voice views contrary to the ruling party's stand, admitted today the draft as presented to Parliament earlier this week was flawed due to several "elements that contradict the PM's thoughts".

"This is most unfortunate," Saifuddin said.

"Najib as the PM can't be looking at too-minute details. It is up to us in the BN to assist him in this regard. So, I'm glad that the Cabinet has agreed to some amendments... we must make this Act real," he added.

The Temerloh MP maintained the proposed law is a good one and that it was part of Najib's "political transformation" process.

"The government is making a radical paradigm shift, from [being] allergic to freedom of assembly to recognising that it is part of democracy," he said.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz, had earlier today disclosed the Cabinet had agreed to amend seven provisions to the Peaceful Assembly Bill after being criticised for tabling a more restrictive and repressive law than the one it was supposed to replace.

Little is known about the amendments, except the government will shorten the advanced assembly notice to the police from 30 days to 10.

Opposition Pakatan Rakyat lawmakers and civil society groups, including the Bar Council had highlighted that Myanmar, which had been under a strict military rule for decades, had this week passed a law allowing street protests.

Parliament is scheduled to debate the Bill on Tuesday.

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