

Kit Siang plays down Cabinet decision to review assembly law
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By Debra Chong

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 26 — DAP's Lim Kit Siang cautioned today against being overly excited by the Barisan Nasional (BN) government's sudden decision to review the proposed peaceful assembly law after tabling it for a second reading in Parliament.

The veteran opposition leader was responding to reports citing de facto law minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz confirming the Najib Cabinet has agreed to amend some seven provisions in the Peaceful Assembly Bill tabled this week.

Details of the seven amendments have yet to be made clear but it is understood that one of the key changes to Datuk Seri Najib Razak's pro-reform laws revolves around the 30-day advanced notice to the police for an assembly.

"These are minor stuff," Lim (picture) told The Malaysian Insider over the phone.

In his statement emailed later, the Ipoh Timor MP said he had received conflicting reports of eight amendments to the proposed assembly law, with all revolving around the advanced notice.

"The 30-day notice is not the only objectionable provision in the Peaceful Assembly Bill, as other provisions should also be deleted," he said.

He gave as examples the arbitrary powers of the police to impose restrictive conditions, the home minister's role in presiding over the appeal, the age restrictions preventing those below 21 years old from being involved in public assemblies and the most controversial ban on street protests.

As a comparison and a reminder, Lim highlighted that Myanmar's military junta had also this week passed a law allowing street protests with only a five-day notice required.

"Najib should explain what is in the indecent haste that the Peaceful Assembly Bill, despite the universal objection, protests and condemnation of civil society, human rights activists and the political opposition, that it must be passed by Dewan Rakyat next week?" Lim challenged the prime minister.

"Is it just to allow Najib to have a 'trophy' to present to the Umno General Assembly, although it goes against his commitment on becoming prime minister that the era of the government knows best is over?" he added.

Najib's Umno is holding its national general assembly next weekend, believed to be the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition's last major event of the year and paving the way for the 13th general elections to be called early next year.

Lim said that if the PM would be doing the nation a more genuine service if he postpones the second reading of the proposed law and refers it to a Parliamentary Select Committee to get full public feedback.

Defending the law before tabling it for the second reading on Thursday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak dismissed criticisms and described the Bill as “revolutionary” and a giant leap towards improving individual freedom.

Civil society groups nationwide, including the Bersih 2.0 coalition and its international chapter Global Bersih, are staging worldwide gatherings today to protest the Bill and pressure Putrajaya into withdrawing it. Parliament is scheduled to debate the Bill on Tuesday.

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