

Kit Siang warns of 'disaster' if assembly law passed

The Malaysian Insider

November 28, 2011

By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 28 — Lim Kit Siang warned Datuk Seri Najib Razak today of a "political disaster" if he insists on pushing the Peaceful Assembly Bill through Parliament without public consultation.

Echoing calls from civil society groups and other opposition lawmakers, the senior DAP MP said Najib should withdraw the Bill before tomorrow's debate and form a parliamentary select committee (PSC) to look into public recommendations for amendments.

"Najib should be forewarned that he is heading for another political disaster after his July 9 Bersih 2.0 misjudgment if he rejects the proposal for a PSC on the Bill," Lim (picture) said in a statement.

"I call on him to reconsider the decision to force the Bill through all three readings in the Dewan Rakyat tomorrow as it will be proof that he has not learnt the lessons of his massive misjudgment and mishandling of the July 9 rally," he added.

Najib mooted the new law to regulate public gatherings following international condemnation over his administration's handling of Bersih 2.0's march for free and fair elections.

Just days after it was tabled, however, his Cabinet agreed to amend several contentious provisions in the Bill after complaints that it would further restrict individual freedom.

But Pakatan Rakyat (PR) and several civil society groups, including Suhakam, Bersih 2.0 and the Bar Council, have vowed to continue protesting the Bill, insisting that it go back to the drawing board to include public recommendations.

Lim complained that Clause 16 of the Bill accords the home minister powers as the "final arbiter" to decide if an assembly could be held.

He said such powers should lie in the hands of the judiciary, similar to the Queensland Peaceful Assembly Act 1992, which he said Malaysia's proposed law is modelled after.

"The Australian home minister and the various Australian state police ministers have no role whatsoever in the decision-making process on freedom of assembly in Australia.

"This is why more time must be given not only to MPs but to civil society, human rights groups and all concerned Malaysians to study the implications of the very badly drafted Bill by referring it to a PSC," he said.

Lim reminded the government of complaints against bias and discrimination by the police that was listed in the Dzaidin Police Royal Commission Report, saying that since its findings were released in 2005 public confidence still remained low.

Among the complaints, he said, were that permits granted to opposition parties and NGOs deemed as anti-establishment had come with numerous "ridiculous" conditions.

"There were also complaints that the police do not seem to be neutral and impartial in the granting of permits, as would appear to be the case from their alleged numerous refusals of permits to opposition political parties and organisations perceived to be linked to them.

"There were also allegations that those attending the events were arrested and questioned as to why they did so and why they expressed opposition towards the government," he added.

But despite the report findings, said Lim, the police have yet to earn respect as an "independent, incorruptible and professional" force.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/kit-siang-warns-of-disaster-if-assembly-law-passed/>