

**Lawyers want BN, Pakatan MPs to reject assembly law**  
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**By Yow Hong Chieh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 28 — The Malaysian Bar has urged lawmakers on both sides of the political divide to reject the Peaceful Assembly Bill that will be debated in Parliament tomorrow.

Bar Council president Lim Chee Wee said lawmakers should instead remit the proposed law to a parliamentary select committee and give due consideration to the Bar's alternative Bill.

"It is not an exaggeration to say that tomorrow, you will hold the liberty of the rakyat in your hands. We ask that you treat it with the deference it deserves," he said in an open letter to lawmakers today.

"Now, more than ever, you must remember that you were elected as a representative of the people, to carry out responsibilities as a wakil rakyat.

"Please do not put blind obedience to party and partisanship before your duties as a servant of the people. The rakyat should not be made to suffer the consequences of party politics."

Lim said the controversial Peaceful Assembly Bill was an "unjust law made in haste... which will impose unreasonable and disproportionate fetters on freedom of assembly".

He pointed out there were provisions in the Bill that were more restrictive than current laws governing public assembly, such as the banning of street protests and the unlimited powers vested in the police to dictate the conditions of any gathering.

Street protests had contributed to the formation of the nation, Lim pointed out. This not only went against Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's Malaysia Day promise to give greater freedoms to Malaysians, Lim said, but "outrageously" prohibited assemblies in motion.

"It is ironic that the government now wants to prohibit the very processions that led to the founding of our nation, and others that moved the prime minister to promise legislative reforms.

"These promised reforms now strike back at the very demonstrations that catalysed them," he said.

Putrajaya agreed to amend seven sections in the Peaceful Assembly Bill following nationwide protests criticising it as more repressive than current laws.

According to Star Online, de facto law minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz confirmed today that the Cabinet had reached the decision during its meeting yesterday.

Nazri said the Cabinet decided to amend the Bill following objections from civil rights groups and opposition lawmakers.

Among others, he said the 30-day advance notice to hold an assembly will be shortened to 10 days.

The provision has been criticised by civil society groups and opposition lawmakers as restrictive, particularly after Myanmar, known for its poor human rights record, passed a similar law earlier this week stipulating only five days' notice to hold an protest.

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