

Hisham says Pakatan must guarantee peaceful rally on January 9

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By Clara Chooi

PUTRAJAYA, Jan 4 — Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein today urged organisers of next week's mammoth gathering for the Sodomy 2 verdict to "convince" the police that their presence will not cause public discord and violence.

The Home Minister stopped short of barring the group from gathering, but stressed that in the spirit of the newly-passed Peaceful Assembly Act 2011, organisers must offer guarantees that the rally will not turn chaotic.

"On this matter, if we look at the spirit of the Act, the key concern is public peace and order.

"So it is highly likely that the organisers have to convince the police that their plans will not destroy public peace and safety, and if they want to gather, the spirit of the Act states that it must be done peacefully," he told a press conference here.

PKR's deputy president Azmin Ali announced yesterday that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) will be amassing a rally of over 100,000 people in a show of support for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim next Monday when the High Court delivers its decision for Sodomy 2.

PKR's deputy president Azmin Ali (bottom right) at yesterday's announcement. — file pic Anwar, 64, is charged with sodomising former male aide, Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan at a condominium in upscale Damansara Heights in June 2008, a few months before returning from a decade in the political wilderness and winning back his Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat.

It represents the second time he has been prosecuted for sodomy.

If found guilty, he could spend up to 20 years behind bars but will escape the caning penalty as he is over 60. It would effectively spell the end of his political career and his chance to be prime minister.

Hishammuddin said the police had yet to receive any application from organisers to hold the gathering but voiced concern over the numerous police reports lodged against the event.

"I think the police will also take that into consideration. The organisers must be responsible and be aware of the rights of those who are opposed to the rally," he pointed out.

"I recommend that they go and speak to the police first, rather than making statements about the gathering," he added.

Hishammuddin, however, gave his assurance that the police are well-prepared for any chaos on January 9, saying the government had taken on board lessons learned from events like last year's July 9 Bersih 2.0 rally.

"As far as security is concerned, and as far as safety of the people is concerned, I believe the police are more than qualified and ready to face whatever eventuality that has been planned for January 9, 2012," he declared.

Hishammuddin also urged the public not to be swayed by emotions when reacting to any incident that may occur during the gathering, referring to the uproar that ensued following the recent stand-off between the police and UPSI students.

"Do not believe entirely what comes out in the media, any media, and give room to the police and the minister to obtain the truth," he said.

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