

Pakatan presses Putrajaya to reveal anti-terror bill
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By Jennifer Gomez

Opposition lawmakers today urged Putrajaya to disclose the draft of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (Pota) to facilitate debates in Parliament and not give it to them at the last minute, which has been the practice with new bills.

Wong Chen (PKR-Kelana Jaya) said that the draft bill was coming up for debate in two weeks' time, yet opposition MPs were in the dark about its contents.

"It is a major act. We need to look at it and get the opinion of academics, defence analysts. And we need to understand who is being targeted in the act," he told reporters at the Parliament lobby.

Datuk Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah (PAS-Kuala Terengganu) agreed with the PKR MP, saying that all opposition MPs were told when they asked about the bill was that even the United States and Australia had such an act.

"But in the US and Australia, it is only used on foreigners. So is that the case here as well?

"That is how it started with the ISA. Tun Razak himself assured the people that it would only be used against the communist, but then we have all seen how it was used against others, especially opposition politicians," he said referring to the promise made by Malaysia's second prime minister Tun Abdul Razak not to abuse the Internal Security Act 1960, a preventive detention law that Malaysia repealed in 2012.

Last week, Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi urged opposition lawmakers to accept the new anti-terrorism law, saying it was not to curb the freedom of speech and human rights, but was targeted at militant activities.

He also said opposition pact Pakatan Rakyat should realise the importance of having such a law to curb terrorism in the country, adding that the new law was also apolitical.

But Wong Chen said today that it was hard to understand why the draft act was still kept under wraps when in all probability, the Attorney-General Chambers would have prepared the draft months ago.

"We would like to consult civil society and also the Bar Council.

"We demand the bill to be put on our tables and on the Parliament website by tomorrow. Any more delay is a travesty to justice and parliamentary democracy," he said.

Raja Bahrin agreed, saying that the public should be treated with respect and there needed to be meaningful participation in the democratic process.

Zahid previously said that Pota would strengthen existing laws such as the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (Sosma) and the Prevention of Crime Act (Poca), though Sosma and Poca were not specifically for prevention of terrorism.

He also stressed that Pota was not a revival of the Internal Security Act or the Emergency Ordinance.

It was reported earlier this month that the new anti-terror act would include provisions that allowed for detention without trial and the implementation of an electronic monitoring device. – March 18, 2015.

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