

PKR make light of Zahid's promise to end street rallies

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By Desmond Davidson

Sarawak PKR has ridiculed Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi's resolve that street rallies will not be allowed any more, saying he does not have the power to restrict the rights of the people to peaceful assembly.

In a meet-the-people session in Kampung Terbat Teban, Tebakang near Serian in Sarawak last Saturday, Zahid had said he does not want street demonstrations to be repeated "as it is not part of Malaysian culture".

"Enough is enough, I do not want 'yellow shirt' or 'red shirt' demonstrations after this because there are many other forums for those not satisfied to voice their views," the Home Minister was quoted by the national news agency Bernama as saying.

But Sarawak PKR chairman Baru Bian today said the right to organise and assemble peacefully is guaranteed by the Federal Constitution.

Baru, a lawyer, said peaceful assembly could only be restricted reasonably but not prohibited under Article 10 (2) (b) of the Constitution.

"The deputy prime minister should know that peaceful demonstrations are permitted under the Peaceful Assemblies Act (PAA) 2012, which allows gatherings to proceed without the need for a permit, although rally organisers must notify the police of the assembly," Baru said.

He said even if a rally organiser failed to give 10 days' notice to police before a gathering, it would not render the assembly illegal and would not attract a criminal penalty for the organiser.

Baru said the problem the country has in street rallies is due to the bias shown by the authorities in enforcing the law.

Baru said despite the Bersih 4 rally in August being a peaceful gathering, calling for electoral reform, "yet the organisers are being investigated and charged for the #Kita Lawan rallies held months earlier".

Charging them, he said, was an apparent retaliation for the Bersih 4 rally.

On the other hand, the pro-government "red-shirt" rally, particularly the violent demonstrations at Petaling Street by extremists who carried racist placards and (shouted racist) chants, saw no actions taken against the organisers, Baru said.

"The fundamental problem in this country is Umno, which is a party supporting racist policies and whose leaders play the racial card to hold on to the eroding support for them."

He said it was no use coming to the Borneo states "to tell us about equality for all races when your actions in West Malaysia speak louder than your words here". – September 28, 2015.

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