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'It's not a pride parade'

KUALA LUMPUR: The organisers of Seksualiti Merdeka claimed yesterday that the event was not aimed at promoting homosexuality but to champion rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders (LGBT).

The event's co-founder, Pang Khee Teik, said it "is not a pride parade" but a series of talks, forums, workshops, art, theatre and music performances, interactive installations and film screenings organised by a coalition of Malaysian non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Pang said the event was aimed at stopping discrimination, harassment and violence towards one's sexual orientation.

It is organised by a coalition of Malaysian NGOs, including the Malaysian Bar Council, Suara Rakyat Malaysia (Suaram), Empower, PT Foundation, the United Nations and Amnesty International.

"We hope to create a platform for the community. Some say this is Western-influenced but that is not true as the LGBT community exists across the world and we have a small population in our country," said Pang.

Bar Council president Lim Chee Wee said all human beings should be treated equally.

The Malaysian Bar's stand is embodied, in particular, in the first three principles of The Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in re-



Pang Khee Teik, co-founder of the banned Seksualiti Merdeka event, appears exasperated by the police action.

lation to sexual orientation and gender identity, which are: the right to the universal enjoyment of human rights, the right to equality and non-discrimination and the right to recognition before the law.

"In Malaysia, the LGBT community has long been treated as 'outsiders' as they face hardships, including a lack of safety due to harassment by

civil and syariah authorities, living in fear of prosecution for the private acts of consenting adults and facing discrimination and denigration," said Lim.

PT Foundation acting executive director Raymond Tai said their primary focus was on AIDS prevention and care, and support for the community most affected by HIV.