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BODY:

-- The new Malaysian government today freed 21 political prisoners and lifted an 11-year ban on a controversial book written by the new prime minister, Mahathir Mohamed, the two-week-old government announced.

Among those released were Kassim Ahmad, chairman of the opposition Malaysian People's Socialist Party, and two parliamentarians from the opposition Democratic Action Party. All 21 prisoners had been held under the Internal Security Act, which enables the government to hold suspected subversives without trial.

"The Malay Dilemma," a book written by Mahathir in 1970 before he entered government service, was banned because the government feared it would fuel racial sentiments among Malays. Among other things, the book alleged that Malays were inferior to Chinese and had to work hard to catch up with the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia.