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Arshad-ISA

MALAYSIAN ENVOY DEFENDS MALAYSIA'S SECURITY LAWS

By: Neville D'Cruz

MELBOURNE, Aug 26 (Bernama) -- The Malaysian High Commissioner to Australia, Mohamed Arshad Hussain defended Malaysia's Internal Security Act (ISA) when addressing a distinguished gathering of business leaders and professionals here.

Arshad said that the ISA was introduced by the British to fight communist terrorists in Malaysia. "We now have different shades of terrorism, both domestic and international, and we need these laws more than ever before," he said.

"Most Malaysians greatly value public order and cherish peace, security and economic progress.

"We need tough laws to maintain internal security, peace and harmony. Some of these laws may appear draconian to foreigners, but most Malaysians accept them as essential for law and order.

"After the Sept 11 attacks (in the US), these tough laws do not appear to be too tough. Preventive detention is not seen as too bad a thing after all."

The Australian Government is planning to introduce a Bill in Parliament to give Australia's national intelligence body, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), similar laws as Malaysia's ISA.

Arshad, who was making his first official visit to the State of Victoria, said Australians, particularly the media and human rights groups, were often inclined to question Malaysia's democratic process and its approach to personal freedom simply because they were not identical to Western norms.

"It should be noted that these differences do not make Malaysia less democratic than others," he said.

Arshad assured the Australians that it would be business as usual when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad retires later next year. "Dr Mahathir will put everything in place, including his successor, for the smooth running of the country. We have nothing to worry about," he said.

Arshad, who was accompanied by his wife, Tunku Suria Tunku Ismail, paid a courtesy call on Victorian Governor John Landy and the popular Premier Steve Bracks. He also visited universities here, addressed the Australia-Malaysia Business Council and called at Dewan Malaysia where he had dinner with Malaysian students.

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