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Right to security

AMONG the many ways of looking at the issue of human rights, there is no denying that Malaysia has come far on its unwavering position about the co-relation between such rights on the one hand, and national interest and quality of life, on the other. The ideals in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights may be regarded as a reference point but square-peg and round-hole situations are unavoidable in a world as diverse as ours.

On Malaysia Human Rights Day yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad again repeated the differences in the Western concept of rights from that of Asian countries - while the West places the rights of individuals before the interests of the group or society, Asian culture places society above self.

Calls for the abolition of the Internal Security Act, for instance, should not be backed by narrow views that it is merely restrictive and does not conform to the freedom advocated by the West because, as has been said many times before, it is necessary to safeguard the nation's security and hence provide protection for the majority.

A change for the sake of change won't do. Furthermore, being a country that upholds the rule of law, there is sufficient redress available for a person who feels the Act has been unjustifiably used against him, as was proven last week by the Federal Court. Some may have suffered much in preventive detention under the ISA, but this alone is no reason to abolish it.

The ISA was enacted and subsequently preserved and enforced in direct response to the degree of threat facing the country. We look forward to the day when it can deservedly fall into disuse. In the meantime, human rights activists should be less concerned about the uncompromising nature of such laws than the overwhelming consensus on the maintenance of law and order.