

Dr M: Cops stopped me from scrapping ISA
Malaysiakini.com
February 17, 2011

Former Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad now claims that he had once tried to abolish the Internal Security Act (ISA) while he was in power.

"I suggested scrapping of the ISA, but I depended on national security advice from the police and they said 'cannot' (because) there still are threats," he said.

Speaking at a forum on democracy organised by the Senate, Mahathir told about 200 people present that the law was imposed by the British colonial power during the communist insurgency of the 1950s.

"The ISA must be invoked when necessary, but when I was the prime minister, I wanted to abolish the ISA but the police were against it," he said.

Mahathir was responding to questions posed by Pasir Mas MP Ibrahim Ali, who expressed support to retain ISA for the purpose of national security.

Mahathir reiterated that the preventive laws are necessary and even country that advocate for absolute democracy and freedom imposed similar laws.

Citing Guantanamo Bay, the US detention facility in Cuba as an example, Mahathir said the ISA does not condone torture that is practised there.

"In Guantanamo Bay, there are 500 detainees, who were not (only) detained without trial, but were also subjected to torture.

"Those who criticise the ISA have never become the prime minister, that is why they don't know," he said in reference to salvos from the opposition.

Mahathir has often been accused of being the chief abuser of the ISA, which allows detention without trial, particularly during Operasi Lalang in 1987 and to quell dissent during the reformasi era in 1998.

Book sparks debate

In a recent book on Mahathir, Doctor M: Operation Malaysia - Conversations with Mahathir Mohamad, the statesman recounts his experience in dealing with these conflicts.

"I actually met all of the opposition members (beforehand) and assured them that they would not be arrested. And you know what the police did? They arrested them. My credibility is gone," Mahathir was quoted as saying by the author, Tom Plate.

He agreed with Plate that he was furious over what the police had done to nab 106 people, including political dissidents, under the ISA in 1987. However, defended having given in to the police to make the decision as they were more familiar with sentiments on the ground.

Several DAP leaders, including veteran Lim Kit Siang who was among those arrested during the dragnet, dismissed Mahathir's claims about the meeting.

"When I suggested that the period (of detention) be reduced from two to one year, they (the advisers) said cannot," Mahathir is quoted as saying in the book.

However, it the book also notes that Mahathir had in 1987 amended the ISA to allow absolute discretion on the length of detention to the minister in charge (of internal security).

Hanif: it was my duty to uphold the law

Another speaker on the forum panel, Mohammed Hanif Omar, who was the inspector-general of police during Operasi Lalang, affirmed that he had indeed dissuaded Mahathir and his then Education Minister Anwar Ibrahim from scrapping the ISA. "When he (Mahathir) became prime minister (the then deputy premier) Musa Hitam told me, 'don't arrest under ISA, Mahathir will not like it'," Hanif told the audience.

Hanif said the Special Branch director then, Rahim Noor (who subsequently abecame IGP), was with him during the briefing with Mahathir and that Rahim was of the opinion that racial sentiments were flaring and going out of control.

Hanif said his duty at the time was to uphold the law and that amending or abolishing the ISA was the duty of the Parliament.

Hanif had told Malaysiakini last week that the decision to arrest the political dissidents was made by his men to curb an outbreak of racial riots.

In the 1987 crackdown on Oct 27, 106 people - mostly opposition leaders and a handful of MCA and Umno politicians - were arrested under the ISA while the publishing permits for The Star, Sin Chew Jit Poh and Watan were revoked.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/156258>