

ISA replacement laws to be tabled next year
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The government will introduce new legislation in parliament next year to replace a tough law allowing preventive detention as time is needed to work out the details.

The legislation would include an anti-terror act and a public order law, Nazri Aziz, the country's de facto law minister, told AFP.

In a surprise announcement, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said yesterday his government would repeal the 51-year-old Internal Security Act (ISA), which allows virtually indefinite detention without trial and is considered a major block on democratic rights.

Government opponents and civil liberties activists have welcomed the move, but called for more details on the new laws and prompt action by the government to effect the changes.

But Nazri (left), who is Najib's minister in charge of legal affairs, said there was not enough time to repeal the act in an October sitting of parliament and that the draft laws would be tabled during the next assembly in March.

"We can't repeal the act in October as we must ensure that those held under the various acts and who need to remain under detention are still held," he said.

"So we can't just abolish the acts overnight without considering national security."

The new laws would be modelled on anti-terrorism legislation used in the United States, Britain and Australia, he added.

No repackaging

Opponents of the tough existing laws have expressed concern at Najib's statement that preventive detention powers would be retained by police, albeit for shorter periods than before, which can only be extended by court order.

Court approval was not previously required.

But Nazri rejected concerns the new laws would merely be a repackaging of the old.

"Najib has taken a bold move in repealing the act so the opposition should wait and see what happens in parliament before making such baseless statements," he said.

Najib took office in 2009 vowing to review the ISA, and yesterday's announcement was seen as a bid to boost his electoral chances with new polls due by 2013 and the opposition gaining strength in recent years.

- AFP