

ISA still relevant in Singapore, says its gov't
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The Singapore government today said the island nation still needs its version of the Internal Security Act (ISA), which it stressed is important to deal with "threats of subversion, racial and religious extremism, espionage and terrorism".

In defending the island state's continued use of the ISA, the Singapore Home Ministry said that the government had used the ISA sparingly, and only against individuals who acted "in a manner prejudicial to the security of Singapore or to the maintenance of public order or essential services".

"No person has ever been detained only for their political beliefs," the ministry said in a statement.

The ministry noted that threats to Singapore's security remain an important issue, especially in the face of the war on terrorism over the past decade with priority put on acting swiftly to prevent an attack from taking place.

The ISA arrests in December 2001 had thwarted "imminent" suicide bombings against establishments in Singapore that were planned by al-Qaeda operatives and assisted by Jemaah Islamiah members, preventing the loss of innocent lives, argued the ministry.

"The ISA continues to be relevant and crucial as a measure of last resort for the preservation of our national security."

The Singapore government acknowledged that the ISA in both countries have the same roots from the time when they were British colonies, but had since "evolved differently" in Singapore and Malaysia.

It highlighted key differences in the law between both countries, stating that suspects can only be held for up to 30 days in Singapore - as opposed to 60 days in Malaysia - and that detainees must be released unconditionally if an Order of Detention or Restriction Order is not secured at the end of the 30-day period.

The ministry's statement also pointed out that the President of Singapore has the power to veto the government's decision to detain individuals if the ISA Advisory Board, chaired by a Supreme Court judge, has recommended the release of a detainee.

"This was an additional safeguard enacted by the Singapore government to prevent misuse of the Act."

Last night, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak announced his administration's plan to repeal the ISA, among other historic decisions that caught the nation by surprise.

This is arguably the most important announcement he has made after being accused of stalling on economic and government reforms that he pledged to pursue when taking over office from Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in April 2009.