

Anwar: No difference between new law and ISA
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The new Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill 2012 tabled for its second reading in the Dewan Rakyat today is no different from the Internal Security Act it is replacing, says Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim.

NONE If anything, Anwar declared, it is more repressive and open to abuse.

"What is its difference from the ISA?" the Permatang Pauh MP asked at a press conference in the Parliament lobby, commenting specifically on indefinite detention.

"If before this, the Home Ministry and police were used, now it is the court process," said Anwar.

He was referring to a clause in the new Bill that allows for the public prosecutor, by way of an oral application, to ask that the court extend the detention of anyone acquitted for any offence under the proposed legislation.

"This is mandatory under the new law. The judge will have to agree. All it takes is an oral request," said Anwar, arguing that the end result would be just the same - indefinite arrest and detention of a person by a legislation that is open to abuse.

Under the ISA formulated in 1960 to fight the communist armed insurgency, the home minister can, upon request of the police and at his discretion, prolong detentions indefinitely.

This is something much criticised by anti-ISA advocates and what the government claimed the new law has addressed.

'Ties the hands of the courts'

Anwar argued that provisions under the new law, such as the mandatory extension of detention pending prosecution has "tied the (hands of the) courts" despite the government's claim that there is legal recourse for detainees.

He also criticised provisions that allow police and the prosecution to circumvent rigorous requirements for testimonies and evidence in court under the Evidence Act and to use "sensitive information" in court without disclosing nor verifying its veracity.

NONE Such provisions, Anwar argued, were as good as imprisoning and accusing detainees without court-admissible evidence, as is the case under the present ISA.

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In an immediate response, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein has called the opposition leader's allegations on the new law "irresponsible".

"This shows that they are an irresponsible opposition," Hishammuddin said, calling their opposition to the new security law an "empty show" for political mileage.

"Observing their debate I saw no content to their argument. They are just trying to deny the fact that we are moving forward," he added.

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