

## **Is the ISA demon being resurrected?**

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COMMENT Speculation is making the rounds and history has shown that in Malaysia, the rumour mills often churn out more credible information than what trickles out from officialdom.

The latest conspiracy theory revolves around the proposal to enact a new law which would provide for detention without trial.

NONE In the course of his transformation agenda, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak had repealed the Internal Security Act, which had served as a potent weapon in the government's arsenal to silence dissent.

The move had left his mentor Dr Mahathir Mohamad frothing and seething.

It was during the former premier's tenure that the authorities invoked the security legislation - which provided for detention without trial - to incarcerate scores of opposition politicians and activists.

Although Mahathir had passed the buck to the police, critics claim that it was he who masterminded the dragnet codenamed Operation Lalang in order to consolidate power.

The ISA replacement, the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012, only provides for 28 days detention for investigation purposes.

As for Najib, with his transformation efforts failing to reverse the BN's fortunes in the last general election, he is now a prime minister under siege.

Sinking image migraine for BN

From the onset, the hardliners in Umno such as Mahathir were not enamored of the new prime minister's all-inclusive approach to win over the hearts and minds of non-Malay voters.

Mahathir had even justified the existence of right-wing movements like Perkasa on the grounds that Umno no longer protected the interests of the Malay community.

And following the latest electoral setback, it is said that the hardliners are twisting

Najib's arm and the latter has no option but to relent.

In the 2008 polls, BN lost its two-third parliamentary majority for the first time and in the just concluded general election, the ruling coalition lost in the battle for popular voters.

With its sinking image appearing impossible to salvage, BN is rattled by the prospect of drowning in the next election. Such a prospect cannot be stomached and must be averted at all costs.

Desperation breeds drastic measures, and it is this fear which is rumoured to be behind the call for a new preventive law to be formed.

The police mooted the proposal, arguing that since the Najib administration abolished the Emergency Ordinance in 2011, which also provided for detention without trial, the freed criminals had returned to a life of crime.

So a new law is needed to rein them in.

The escalating crime rate has become a major concern for Malaysians and newspapers are replete with reports of snatch thefts and robberies.

EO detainees, on the other hand, were hardcore criminals, mostly involved in triad activities and drug trafficking. These are not criminals who indulge in snatch theft and house break ins.

Good guy, bad guy game

And while the attorney-general had dismissed the proposal to enact a new preventive detention legislation, the prime minister, however, did not rule it out.

Najib had said that the proposal would be studied, but added that feedback would also be obtained from concerned parties such as Suhakam and the Bar Council.

It is common knowledge that in the past, the government paid little or no heed to the recommendations put forth by both these entities, often bulldozing its agenda through even in the face of vociferous objections.

So is the police proposal part of a larger scheme, one which has little to do with putting criminals behind bars and keeping the streets safe?

Is it part of an orchestration to push for the enactment of a new law, which would

encapsulate the spirit of the ISA, and be eventually used against dissidents and political foes?

With its future appearing bleaker with each sunset and citizens becoming increasingly brazen and critical, would BN revert back to Mahathirism to strike fear in the hearts of voters?

And should this alleged plot be set in motion, would it protect the ruling coalition from being ousted or serve as the final nail in its coffin?

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