

ISA to stay: Syed Hamid
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Malaysia will keep its controversial Internal Security Act to ensure domestic security, Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar said today, despite renewed pressure from rights groups to shelve them.
MCPX

Syed Hamid defended the decision to keep the ISA as opposition parties called for the release of all detainees being held under the law - which allows for indefinite detention without trial.

"The government at present has no intention of amending or repealing the Internal Security Act," he said.

"The ISA is still relevant and it is not a punitive law but a preventive law in order to ensure that we protect security, peace and law and order," he added. "We must prevent events from happening."

Syed Hamid's remarks come as the government faces increasing calls by opposition and government coalition members to release five Indian rights activists who were detained last December under the ISA.

The Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) leaders angered the government after mounting a mass rally in November alleging discrimination in Malaysia, which is dominated by Muslim Malays.

Police used tear gas, water cannons and baton charges to break up the street protest, which drew 8,000 people and came just two weeks after another rare demonstration organised by electoral reform campaigners.

Since then, one of the Hindraf leaders, M Manoharan, has been elected to the state assembly, while another has been hospitalised after reportedly being denied medication for diabetes.

Rights groups say 70 people, mainly alleged Islamic militants, are being held under the ISA.

Parts of the ISA date back to the British colonial era, when it was used against communist insurgents. It provides for two-year detention periods that can be renewed indefinitely.