

On ISA and hypocrites: Dr M shares his views
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In his latest blog posting, former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad has touched on a topic which could be considered close to his heart - the Internal Security Act or ISA for short.

"Having released people and having detained people under the ISA, I think I know something about this act and its application," he had pointed out at the onset of his argument.

Mahathir noted that while it was important to remember that the ISA was a preventive law, he however conceded that it had been used in the past to silent dissent.

Turning the clock back all the way to the 1960s, the 84-year-old statesman recalled how freedom fighter and politician Abdul Aziz Ishak was incarcerated under the law which allows for detention without trial.

Known to always be two steps ahead of his adversaries, the former premier beat those who might pop the question, 'What about those you arrested?'

Ops Lalang: Why I did it

And as for the infamous Operasi Lalang in 1987 during his tenure which witnessed scores of opposition politicians and activists being hauled away to the gulag, Mahathir had an excuse.

"At this point visitors to this blog are likely to say I did the same. I admit I did detain people under the ISA in the 1987 Ops Lalang. But it was not because they were members of the opposition.

"The police had informed me that there was likely to be racial clashes over the issue of Chinese education and the intention of some Umno members to hold a million-strong demonstration in Kuala Lumpur," he reasoned.

"The people detained were not only members of the opposition but included Umno members. As soon as the threat passed, the detainees were released. The issue was not political opposition to the government but the threat to national security," he added.

Mahathir, who stepped down in 2003 after helming the nation and Umno for 22 years, also said that he did not expect his detractors to accept the above explanation.

"But that is normal," he added. "Detractors would never admit to being wrong."

Mahathir also said that he found it odd that some who were detained under the ISA, now supported this preventive law.

"I am sure they don't support abuses of the law though," he added.

Hypocritical critics

Shifting his focus to the international arena, Mahathir said the tag team of George W Bush and Tony Blair did not hesitate to detain so-called suspects without even being sanctioned by any law.

"They were so critical about our ISA before but not only did they detain thousands of so-called suspects, they actually tortured the detainees when they felt threats to their security.

"The so-called protagonists of human rights were clearly critical when others resorted to preventive detention. When they felt threatened they not only detained people but they did this without any law which provided for such an act," he said.

And just because "our critics were hypocrites", Mahathir said it did not mean that Malaysia should retain the ISA.

But he stressed that preventive detention was vital in this country in order to keep racist extremists in check.

"Without this threat, racist extremists would undermine the stability of this country. That extreme racialism could lead to violence was not something we could take lightly.

"We must value our stability because it has made it possible for this country to develop much faster than other countries," he said.

Clear-cut provision

Mahathir was also not in favour of the ISA being replaced by a court hearing.

"In Malaysia, courts take a long time to pass judgment, months or even years. By then the violence would have taken place, i.e. the court action would have failed to achieve the prevention that the law was meant for," he said.

However, he concurred that there was a need to review the ISA.

"I don't think it should be done away with but there must be a clear cut provision as to when it could be used. We cannot have people being detained for three days and then released because the detention was for the detainee's safety," he said.

Mahathir suggested that the detention period could be shortened from two years to one while the six monthly review "be carried out by properly qualified individuals who have the country's interest at heart besides a desire to maintain human rights."

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