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Dr M says ISA should stay but needs review

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FORMER Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad defended the existence of the Internal Security Act (ISA) but feels that there is a need to review the law.

In his *chedet.com* blog yesterday, he reminded those who are against the ISA that it is a preventive law and cannot be applied after a crime is committed.

He reiterated that the ISA can be applied only in certain cases when there is a threat to the security of the country.

"A possible uprising or civil violence would constitute a threat," he said.

"I admit that 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. Those detained were not only members of the Opposition but also Umno members.

"As soon as the threat passed, the detainees were all released," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it seemed odd that some of those who were detained under the law and were against it before are supporting it now.

"When the so-called war on terror was launched by former United States president George W. Bush and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, they

did not hesitate to detain suspects without even being sanctioned by any law. They were so critical about our ISA before but not only did they detain thousands, they actually tortured these detainees."

However, Dr Mahathir said that although critics are hypocrites, that does not mean that the ISA should not be retained.

"There is a need for preventive detention in Malaysia simply because without it, threat of racist extremists would undermine the stability of this country. We must value our stability because it has made it possible for this country to develop much faster than other countries."

He questioned the need to replace the ISA with court hear-

ings as it will take a long time to pass judgment.

"It may take months or even years. By then the violence would have taken place. Thus, the court action would have failed to achieve the prevention that the law is meant for."

Still, Dr Mahathir said, he agrees that there is 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 can be used. Perhaps, the period should be shortened to one year and the six monthly review be carried out by qualified individuals who have the country's interest at heart, besides a desire to maintain human rights," he said.