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Make no mistake, these transformations are real

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak made history for Malaysia Day by announcing the Government's decision to abolish the country's draconian laws.

The Internal Security Act 1960, the Banishment Act 1959 and three emergency proclamations will be abolished and the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 amended.

The Restricted Residence Act 1933 and the law against assembly in public places will be reviewed to allow for free assembly as in other democratic countries. Citizens will no longer be apprehended for their political beliefs.

These changes represent a real and substantive transformation in the Government's, and thus also the



country's, temperament and psyche. Slaughtering that nasty albatross of unjust laws has been long overdue.

Malaysia and Malaysians needed to outgrow the stupefying legal restrictions of bad laws and their stultifying arbitrariness.

No previous government has been as courageous in going as far to throw off these shabby vestiges of colonialism and roll back their musty Third World anachronisms.

We must give credit where it is due, and due credit must go to Najib's leadership for these bold, progressive and enlightened meas-

ures.

A large community of right-thinking Malaysians, including this newspaper, has consistently advocated these changes and championed their inherent virtues.

The Government will next table a motion in Parliament to effect these reforms. This is virtually guaranteed, given the widespread unpopularity of these laws within and outside Parliament.

We cannot always depend on good men not to misuse bad laws. It is far better that bad laws be removed so that the temptation to use them is discarded as well.

Any use of a bad law amounts to an abuse of the legal process. Henceforth, no Malaysian need suffer any political persecution.

In a single stroke, Najib has done more than any other national leader to bridge the gap between law and justice. He has helped to ensure a better rule of law and a fairer administration of justice for all.

Draconian laws that merely purported to safeguard national security had come to instigate the opposite. They produced a groundswell of discontent that alienated the governed from the Government.

It has meant an unfortunate scuttling of good governance, with a consequent decline in public confidence in our public institutions. Law enforcement tended to rely on blanket dragnets rather than sound investigation and proper detective work.

But now, the onus has returned to

all the rightful national institutions. The change affirms the primacy of Parliament, the legitimacy of the courts, the essence of constitutional provisions and the rights of the people.

Criminals will still be contained because there are other laws for them. And political oppositionists may still complain because their popular appeal may be dented.

But Malaysians will now be led properly rather than prodded, with the country being governed through consultation and consent rather than force or fear.

A dark passage has ended for our nation, and Malaysia can be better for it. Indeed, Malaysia will be better for it because every sector in the country has reason to rejoice.