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Najib keeps his word on ISA

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Last year, the Prime Minister promised to do away with the dreaded Internal Security Act. In keeping with his promise, the Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill 2012 has been tabled to ensure a more just treatment of security trials.

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THE reverberations from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak's political transformation programme can be traced to initiatives started late last year but their effect on the nation will certainly be felt through the coming years.

In his Malaysia Day address in September last year, Najib promised to do away with the dreaded Internal Security Act (ISA), a law that had been subjected to much contentious debate over the past 52 years.

In keeping with his word, the Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill 2012 was tabled last Monday and accepted by lawmakers under a



historic move that would see the repeal of the ISA.

The replacement law seeks to maintain peace and freedom for Malaysians while ensuring a more just and open treatment of security trials.

Under the new law, for example, the Home Minister no longer has the power to detain without trial for two years those suspected of being a security threat.

Instead, suspects would now be brought before the courts to answer

the allegations after a maximum detention of 28 days.

The new law is also a reflection of the steps taken by Najib to put the nation on the path towards greater democracy.

No Malaysian can be arrested solely for his or her political beliefs or political activity when the new law comes into effect.

The tabling of the Bill drew positive reactions from both sides of the political divide.

For Barisan Nasional parliamentarians, it was proof that Najib's promises of change were not mere talk.

The sentiment, however, was not entirely shared by their Pakatan Rakyat counterparts.

Pakatan leader Datuk Seri Anwar

Ibrahim was seen leaving Parliament without making any comments to the media after the Bill was tabled.

At a press conference at Parliament lobby later, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng refrained from commenting on the Bill, saying he needed time to read it first.

Although it was learnt that Pakatan wanted to make its official stand on the matter at a later date, some of the Opposition MPs did give their views on the Bill.

Among them was Bukit Bendera MP Liew Chin Tong who questioned the provision which allows action to be taken against "activity detrimental to parliamentary democracy".

PKR vice-president - a former ISA detainee and Batu MP - Tian Chua noted that some parts of the new

laws were vague and subject to abuse.

The MPs are expected to give a clearer view tomorrow when the Bill is tabled for debate.

Also significant was the tabling of the Universities and University Colleges (Amendment) Bill 2012, which seeks to give university students greater freedom of expression by allowing them to be members of political parties without threat of punishment.

The amendments will allow students to join any organisation, whether within or outside Malaysia.

The move also reflects the Government's intention to allow greater freedom of expression among the younger generation.