

Utusan changes tune about ISA after Najib suggests repeal
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 18 — Utusan Malaysia, one of the staunchest defenders of the Internal Security Act (ISA), is now changing its tune about the security law but without remorse for what had happened in the past when the Umno-owned daily had called for it to be put into use.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced a slew of reforms to press and security laws on Thursday and the lifting of three Emergency Declarations, saying that the move to increase civil liberties was “risky, but we are doing this for our survival.”

“It is true what Najib had announced is appropriate at this point in time. We should look forward to the new world reality of today. Change will happen sooner or later. The country cannot forever remain set in its ways.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced a slew of reforms to press and security laws on Thursday. — file pic

“This era demands a more open and modern government which is efficient in dealing with threats without depending on laws such as the ISA,” the Malay daily’s editors wrote today under the pseudonym Awang Selamat.

Apart from the repeals, Najib said there will be amendments to the Police Act to allow for freedom of assembly according to international norms, although street protests would still be outlawed.

Both Najib and Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein had said that the ISA along with the three Emergency Declarations would be repealed when both the Dewan Negara and Dewan Rakyat have their next sitting.

However, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz had said there will not be enough time to repeal the ISA when Parliament reconvenes in October and that the draft replacement laws would only be tabled during the next sitting in March.

Mingguan Malaysia, the weekend edition of the Umno daily, pointed out that reaction to the abolishment of the ISA had been mixed.

“A lot are positive and received it well, calling it a bold step for change for Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak. No fewer are sceptical and concerned because the ISA is still seen as relevant in Malaysia. There are also some who are upset.

“But Awang’s opinion is not important. More important is the reaction and thoughts of the people, non-governmental organisations (NGO), the security forces, academics, civil servants, and various other groups. At this stage, let the people give any reaction and input that they want to. We have to be brave to listen to all kinds of comments,” he wrote.

Awang said people who are unhappy with the announcement should be given due consideration and shouldn’t be dismissed as “they are the ones who had been strong government supporters”.

"Awang thinks that the announcement to abolish the ISA needs to be followed by a thorough explanation from the ministry and relevant agencies.

"If not, the government and its leadership may be painted in a negative light," he said, adding that he is confident that the opposing voices can turn positive through meetings and dialogues.

Awang also said based on his observations, a lot of people are still unclear about the "wisdom" behind the need to abolish the ISA and the strength that the two new replacement laws will have in dealing with security threats.

"There is also speculation that the abolishment of the ISA will hurt Malay politics. Other than that, the government has been accused of bowing down to the aspirations of other races without the guarantee that this will boost support for Barisan Nasional (BN) in the next general elections," he said.

Awang added that Malays should reassess the situation so as not to be afraid of change, adding that the abolishment of the ISA should encourage Malays to be more aggressive in politics.

"Of late, only the non-Malays are politicking wisely; in fact, they are more united and vociferous. The minority voice has become like the majority to the extent that it has shaped the new political landscape.

"The abolishment of the ISA and other changes, including amendment to the Printing Act, is a sign of openness to all, not just to a certain group or race only," he opined.

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