

## **Take cue from ISA repeal to drive true change, Jakarta Post tells Malaysians**

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 20 — Malaysians must seize the chance to push for real democratic reforms now that the “winds of freedom” appear to be blowing across Southeast Asia, a leading Indonesian newspaper has said.

The Jakarta Post said today Malaysia’s decision to scrap the Internal Security Act (ISA) was “refreshing” but cautioned that, while freedom was contagious, it needed “additional force” from within to ensure meaningful changes are brought about.

“Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines are among Southeast Asian states that have embraced freedom in the true sense of the word when they ended autocratic rule in the 1980s and 1990s.

“These three countries have since either backtracked or stagnated on their commitment to freedom,” the newspaper said in an editorial.

Last Thursday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced that the repeal of the ISA and the three Emergency Declarations when both the Dewan Negara and Dewan Rakyat have their next sitting.

He said new anti-terrorism laws will be enacted to protect the peace, harmony and security of the country.

Najib also said the government would do away with annual printing and publishing permits with permits that can be cancelled if regulations are flouted.

The Jakarta Post further warned today that Najib faced a tough time selling his reforms to peers and questioned if political leaders were ready for such risky change but it was optimistic that public demands for greater freedom would be hard to resist in the long term.

“Prime Minister Najib’s plan for more freedom may not necessarily materialise in Parliament still largely controlled by conservative forces but history has also shown that once unleashed, the winds of freedom will be difficult to withstand,” it said.

“Countries that are moving up the economic ladder will sooner or later have to deal with the question of freedom. Education and greater prosperity create a whole new generation of people more critical of their governments, especially on questions of freedom, justice and governance.”

Pluralist Indonesia transitioned to a more open and liberal society following the fall of autocratic President Suharto, who was forced to resign in 1998 largely over his mishandling of the Asian economic crisis.

Recently, however, Southeast Asia’s most populous state has witnessed a conservative backlash led by hardline Muslim groups, with the Indonesian Parliament passing a controversial anti-pornography law in 2008 which critics claimed stifled freedom of

expression.

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