

## **ISA repeal delayed to consult stakeholders, say ministers**

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**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 3 — The government said today that the Internal Security Act (ISA) can only be repealed in March as it needs to consult and engage with stakeholders to ensure “we get it right”.

The replacement of the ISA, which allows for preventive detention, with two new laws was the highlight of Datuk Seri Najib Razak’s Malaysia Day address in which he promised more freedom to the public.

But opposition lawmakers have called the delay in repealing the law, which it says Barisan Nasional (BN) abuses to silence dissent, a “cop out” as the prime minister is likely to call snap polls soon after Budget 2012 is passed.

“No, it’s a question of engagement and consultation. We want to get it right,” Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein (picture) told reporters when quizzed on the delay.

Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz also said that the new laws were now in the hands of the Attorney-General and the government would need to be cautious when repealing the ISA.

“If we have no new law, then we must immediately release terrorists currently detained under the ISA,” the de facto law minister told reporters in Parliament today.

When told that the Bar Council has said that no new laws were needed as Malaysia had other legislation to deal with terrorism, Nazri said “that is the Bar’s view and it is one which we will look at.”

Datuk Seri Najib Razak tabled in Parliament today the repeal of the Restricted Residence Act and the Banishment Act, as announced in his Malaysia Day address to kick off his reform package.

The repeal of the two laws is scheduled for debate on Wednesday.

However, the repeals of the ISA and three emergency declarations were not mentioned in Dewan Rakyat today.

These reforms appear to be key concessions by Najib to win back middle Malaysia before snap polls expected early next year.

His administration had come under heavy fire for its clampdown on the July 9 Bersih rally for free and fair elections.

Police had fired tear gas and water cannons to disperse tens of thousands of demonstrators in chaotic scenes which resulted in nearly 1,700 arrested, scores injured and the death of an ex-soldier.

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