

Najib announces repeal of ISA, three emergency declarations
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 15 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced tonight the repeal of the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA) and the three Emergency Declarations when both the Dewan Negara and Dewan Rakyat have their next sitting.

The prime minister said that new laws will be enacted to protect the peace, harmony and security of the country.

He also announced that the government will do away with annual printing and publishing permits with permits that can be cancelled if regulations are flouted.

Najib acknowledged in his address to the nation on the eve of Malaysia Day that the move to increase civil liberties was "risky, but we are doing this for our survival."

"No individual will ever be detained simply due to political ideology," he said in his speech that was broadcast live on all local television stations.

The move to scrap the law has been hailed by ex-ISA detainee and DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng as "an epochal move" but cautioned that the federal government should not try to dress up the old laws in new security laws being proposed by Najib.

The Barisan Nasional (BN) chief said that two new security laws would be introduced for preventive detention which would be limited only to cases of terrorism and "ensure that basic human rights are protected."

Najib said that under the new laws, detentions could only be extended by the court and therefore "the power of detention will be shifted from the executive to the judiciary, unless it concerns terrorism."

Before a studio audience of 800 including his entire Cabinet, he also announced that the Banishment Act would be repealed while he will do away with the need for annual publishing permits under the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA).

The Umno president also said that the Police Act would be amended to allow for freedom of assembly according to international norms, although street protests would still be outlawed.

Various ministers and leaders of Barisan Nasional watch Najib deliver his historical speech in Kuala Lumpur September 15 2011. — Picture by Choo Choy May
The Malaysian Insider understands that Najib's speech is the start of an election push which will definitely not be held this year although there was speculation of snap polls in November.

Najib came to power in April 2009 with the promise of reviewing the ISA but has now done away with the security law completely in what appears to be a drastic move to win back middle Malaysia.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said this week Najib should push back the election timetable and the influential former prime minister's views has found support among Cabinet and senior government leaders who want the Barisan Nasional (BN) government to regain greater support.

The latest survey from local pollster Merdeka Center showed that Najib's popularity slid to 59 per cent this August from the highest of 79 per cent in May 2010, fuelled by rising concerns over the surge in living costs and his government's handling of the July 9 Bersih 2.0 rally.

The Bersih 2.0 rally and spike in living costs this year are similar to events in 2007 that eventually led to BN's loss of its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and four states in Election 2008 to three opposition parties that later organised themselves into a pact called Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

That led to Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi losing his job in 2009 in favour of Najib who became the country's sixth prime minister after more than 30 years in government. Najib's father, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, was the country's second prime minister.

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