

Pakatan warns Najib against backtracking on ISA, law reforms
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 16 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) leaders have demanded that Datuk Seri Najib Razak guarantee that there will be no backtracking on his proposed law reforms by ensuring the necessary changes are made before the next general election.

Opposition leaders have predicted that the prime minister's decision to do away with the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA) and the three Emergency Declarations will not sit well with right-wing pressure groups within Umno and Perkasa.

PAS central working committee member Dr Dzulkelfy Ahmad (picture) said Najib's latest announcement will put him at loggerheads with Perkasa and some senior Umno leaders, and that the PM needed to stay firm with his decision.

"We are telling Najib not to pander to right-wingers by ensuring reforms are done before the next GE. Don't allow them to coerce him and make him backtrack.

"Najib has now positioned himself to be at loggerheads with right-wing Perkasa, Umno leadership," the PAS leader told The Malaysian Insider.

The Kuala Selangor MP stressed that the "proof in the pudding" will be if Najib successfully carries out all the law reforms as soon as possible.

"Of course, it can be said what he did last night definitely required courage... but he (Najib) has to foresee possible resistance," said Dzulkelfy.

DAP national publicity secretary Tony Pua remained sceptical of Najib's latest announcement, and cautioned the public from getting carried away with the news.

"We've seen sufficient U-turns when Najib comes under pressure from right-wing groups that we won't be surprised if the same happens again," Pua told The Malaysian Insider.

Najib announced last night the repeal of the 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.

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.

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 have found support among the Cabinet and senior government leaders who want the 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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