

Najib's clear view on ISA cuts internal opposition, says Nazri
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PUTRAJAYA, Sept 20 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak did not face much internal resistance to his plans to repeal the Internal Security Act (ISA) because the prime minister made his intentions clear when taking office in 2009, Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz said today.

However, the minister in the Prime Minister's Department said Najib must still consider the views of conservative and pressure groups within the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition when commenting on former Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's comments that his own reforms were opposed by hardliners.

"During his (Abdullah's) time, there was some opposition then as he made no clear indication what he wanted to do but when Najib became prime minister, he made it clear that his intention was to review the ISA," Nazri (picture) said at his ministry's Hari Raya open house here.

"This could mean amendments, abolish or to repeal the ISA. He more or less alerted various groups and the government of his intention, and this helped to prevent obstacles by BN members themselves," he added.

However, Nazri acknowledged that pressure groups within the ruling coalition remained and must be considered.

"There will be pressure groups coming from Umno or other component parties. We must remember that within the coalition there will be some with conservative views. We must also consider this," he said.

Najib announced last Thursday the repeal of the ISA, the three Emergency Declarations and also the need for annual printing and publishing permits when both Dewan Negara and Dewan Rakyat have their next sitting.

The Umno president said new laws will be enacted to protect the peace, harmony and security of the country but admitted that they were "risky but necessary for our survival."

Najib replaced Abdullah 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.

But critics have warned that the BN chief will face pressure from right-wing elements within Umno and other lobby groups such as Perkasa.

Abdullah came into power in 2003, also with the promise of liberal reforms, but only delivered his reform package after the 2008 general election which saw BN fail to secure its customary two-thirds majority of Parliament, leading to his resignation a year later.

The Abdullah administration passed the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), Judicial Appointments Commission and Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission Acts just

months before he stepped down despite criticism that they were watered-down.

The MACC especially has been repeatedly accused of being biased against Pakatan Rakyat (PR) while two deaths in custody including that of a DAP aide have further dented its credibility.

Putrajaya's reform package was seen by political observers as a bid to reclaim middle Malaysia after the disastrous handling of the July 9 Bersih rally that saw the Najib administration being widely criticised in the international media just as he was pitching the country to foreign investors.

The latest survey from local pollster Merdeka Center has also showed that Najib's popularity slid to 59 per cent this August from the 79 per cent high in May 2010, fuelled by rising concerns over the surge in living costs and the Bersih clampdown.

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