

Putrajaya to set timetable for law reforms tomorrow, says Najib
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 27 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak today reaffirmed his government's commitment to increase civil liberties in the country, saying Putrajaya will decide tomorrow on a timetable to carry out his promised reforms to security and press laws.

Without divulging details, the prime minister said the first round of reforms would be delivered during the coming Parliament sitting next month and promised more would follow suit over the next few months.

"At this stage, we want people to have the idea that we are serious about it, we are committed towards it and this coming Parliament, you will see a slew of new legislation, or rather actions on our part to repeal certain Acts and public will be informed in due course," he told participants at the close of the Khazanah Megatrends Forum 2011 this evening.

The prime minister responding to a question by a participant on when his administration planned to implement the security and press law changes he had promised in his recent Malaysia Day address.

Among others, Najib had announced the repeal of the Internal Security Act (ISA), amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA), the lifting of three Emergency Declarations and the repeal and amendments to other security laws.

"We are in process now of looking at some of the best practices, some of the norms that are in place, not only within the region but internationally, and we will be tackling them one by one. We will decide tomorrow on the timetable.

"The objective of the new policy would be to ensure greater civil liberties in Malaysia; we want to emerge as a modern functioning democracy," Najib told the forum, earning applause.

He said his Malaysia Day message merely touched on some "basic principles", adding that once his administration ironed out the details of the reforms, subsequent announcements would be made.

Najib earned praise across the political divide for his law reform pledges but many civil society groups and opposition lawmakers also expressed doubt that the prime minister would follow through with his promises.

They pointed out that Najib had also announced the enactment of two new security laws in place of the ISA, asking if this meant the government was merely rebranding the contentious Act.

Political hardliners are also pressuring the prime minister to preserve the spirit of the ISA in the two new laws, claiming Malaysia was still in need of such preventive legislation.

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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