

**No more ISA
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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday announced an orderly "political transformation", seeking the repeal of the Internal Security and Banishment acts.

He also said the government would look at making major amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications and Restricted Residence acts.

"As I promised in my inaugural speech when I first took over as prime minister on April 3, 2009, that the ISA would be reviewed comprehensively, I am glad to announce on this historic night that the ISA will be abolished." To prevent subversive acts, planned acts of violence and terrorism, he said two new laws would be drafted to preserve public peace and order.

Najib said publications would also no longer need to renew their licences annually as they would now be valid until they were cancelled by the government.

The government will also be reviewing Section 27 of the Police Act 1967, which deals with freedom of assembly, which is guaranteed by Article 10 of the Federal Constitution.

However, Najib said the government still strongly held on to the principle that there should not be any street demonstration, but added that the specifics on the right to assemble would be established later by taking into account international norms.

Announcing the reforms in his Malaysia Day message last night, Najib said the government would not hesitate to amend or abolish any laws that were no longer relevant.

On the two new laws, he said the government would ensure the basic rights and freedoms of those involved were preserved.

"The new laws will have substantially shorter detention periods by the police and further extensions could only be done by a court order, but laws regarding terrorism will remain under the jurisdiction of the (home) minister.

"On another point, the government is also giving its commitment that no individuals will be detained solely for their political ideologies." Generally, said Najib, the reforms meant that the power to extend the detention period was moving from the executive to the judiciary wings of the government, except where terrorism was concerned.

He also announced that the government would table a motion in Parliament to declare an end to all the states of emergency which had been announced before this.

(Only the emergency declared during the Confrontation with Indonesia had been officially ended.) Najib said this decision was made as the nation's reality had now changed and the government felt the pulse of the people and also their aspirations in seeing a more dynamic democracy, on a par with other democracies in the world.

"It's time Malaysians head towards a future with a new paradigm based on new hopes and not be held back by historic nostalgia." Najib said in preparing the people to face unusual threats to the nation's safety and well-being, special measures were needed, which sometimes seemed out of sync with democratic norms.

"This is a global reality and widely accepted. This is not something unusual or foreign.

"It is proven as countries like the United States and United Kingdom have drafted special laws to handle terrorists threats post-Sept 11." He said the key point was to maintain a balance between national security and individual freedom.

For instance, he said the freedom of speech enshrined in the Federal Constitution did not mean that people could use it to slander or incite hatred.

Najib said Malaysia and its people were now at a crossroads and the choice they now made would determine the nation's fate and also the shape of the nation that would be inherited by future generations.

"But the question is, are we able to go past our prejudices and can Malaysians from different backgrounds, socio-economic status and ideologies reach a consensus not to give in to hatred and suspicions that will lead down a valley of indignity?" He said the answers were clear and the steps that he had announced were the early initiatives of a political transformation for the nation.

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