

David Cameron gives Najib pat on back for ISA repeal
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, April 12 - Datuk Seri Najib Razak has shown determination and leadership by moving to repeal the controversial Internal Security Act (ISA), said British Prime Minister David Cameron today.

Cameron praised his Malaysian counterpart for showing "the right response in my view to the extremism and violence that has blighted so many lives around the world" despite growing criticism of laws to replace the Act that allows for detention without trial,

"At home, your determination to engage in political reform and tackle Malaysia's outdated security law both are testament to your leadership," he said.

Putrajaya's Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill 2012 was met with growing criticism over claims that it persists in denying basic liberties, just hours after being tabled in Parliament earlier this week.

Global civil liberties watchdog Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a statement the Bill will "open the door to a range of future abuses" if it is passed, as expected, by the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN).

"The Malaysian government is putting to rest the long-derided ISA, but it is also setting the stage for future abuses," HRW's deputy Asia director Phil Robertson said.

The ISA replacement law was tabled in the Dewan Rakyat Tuesday, removing the government's option to detain individuals without trial and providing a maximum detention of 28 days for investigation purposes.

Under the ISA, an individual believed to have committed a security offence can be detained for up to two years without trial, on orders from the home minister.

The Bill seeks to provide for "special measures" relating to security offences for the purpose of maintaining public order and security and for connected matters.

The new law also notably states that no individual can be arrested solely for his political belief or any political activity, as promised by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak last year when announcing a raft of reforms aimed at increasing civil liberties.

But the Bill, the first of two laws that will replace the ISA, still allows the police to arrest and detain "any person whom he has reason to believe to be involved in security offences" without warrant for 24 hours for investigation.

This led the Malaysian Bar to call for a review of the law which allows a summary of evidence to build a case, as opposed to the evidence itself and gives police power to detain for 28 days and intercept communications without judicial oversight.

"The radical departure from the ordinary rules of evidence may negatively impact on the accused's right to a fair trial," Bar Council president Lim Chee Wee said in a statement.

He also noted the Bill's definition of security offences under Section 3 was "too wide" and urged the government to use a more precise one, as can be found in the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism.

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