

Government tables new security law to replace ISA
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 10 — A new law to replace the Internal Security Act (ISA) was tabled in the Dewan Rakyat today, removing the government's option to detain without trial and providing a maximum detention of 28 days for the purpose of investigation.

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 Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill, tabled for first reading by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz (picture), states in section 12 that "all security offences shall be tried by the High Court".

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.

These include action "threatened by a substantial body of persons both inside and outside Malaysia" to cause a substantial number of citizens to fear, organised violence against persons or property; to excite disaffection against the Yang di-Pertuan; which is prejudicial to public order in, or the security of, the Federation; or to procure the alteration, otherwise than by lawful means, of anything by law established.

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 towards increasing civil liberties.

The Bill, said to be the first of two laws to replace the half-a-century-old ISA, however, still allows a police officer to arrest and detain "any person whom he has reason to believe to be involved in security offences" without warrant for 24 hours for the purpose of investigation.

Section 4 of the Bill also states that a police officer above the rank of superintendent can extend the period of detention for a period of "not more than 28 days", also for investigation.

But those deemed unnecessary to be kept further under detention past the initial 24 hours may be released but an "electronic monitoring device" may be attached on the person for up to 28 days.

This, however, said the Bill, must be by application to the court by a public prosecutor.

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