

Hishammuddin: Stakeholders consulted two years before security law reforms mooted
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KUALA LUMPUR, April 10 — Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein insisted today that all relevant stakeholders were fairly consulted before the government mooted the new Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill, which seeks to replace the Internal Security Act (ISA).

The home minister, responding to complaints that anti-ISA groups were not involved in the drafting of the Bill, pointed out that the government had been in discussion with groups like Suhakam and the Bar Council since two years ago when amendments to the ISA were first suggested.

"Consultation has been done, two years ago ... with Suhakam, Bar Council and others. All discussions leading to amendments were done two years ago.

"So those who say the issues discussed now were not discussed earlier, I think they might be looking at a different agenda," Hishammuddin (picture) told reporters in Parliament.

He claimed that those who were "genuine and sincere" in wanting true reforms to current security laws that are deemed outdated have said that the newly-proposed legislation was a "historic move forward" and a work in progress.

"There is an ulterior motive in wanting to get emotions involved, or politics, in some cases.

"Because, we are taking the wind from their sails ... some people are using the ISA as their political arguments," he said.

Hishammuddin added that those who insist on refuting the government's transformation measures for the country's security laws should have their intentions questioned.

"If they only want political mileage and do not see what changes we have brought – striking a balance between the country's needs and human rights, national security and public freedom – if this is denied, then they are only viewing things from a political standpoint," he said.

The Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill, which is meant to replace the Internal Security Act (ISA), was tabled earlier this morning in Parliament, promising to abolish the highly-criticised provision of detention without trial and allowing 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 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.

Hishammuddin also announced today that when the Bill was approved for tabling by Cabinet, it had come attached with a condition that he had mooted to increase the allocation for the police for “capacity building”.

He pointed to the maximum 28-day detention under the Bill for persons suspected of committing a security offence, saying that extra allocation would enable the police to speed up investigation.

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