

Guan Eng: BN apology needed for ISA closure
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 16 — Lim Guan Eng today pushed the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) to issue a public apology to all “victims of the ISA (Internal Security Act)”, insisting that this was the only way to prove the government’s sincerity in repealing the controversial preventive law.

Lim, who was himself an ISA detainee during Operasi Lalang in 1987, told the Dewan Rakyat today that so long as BN refuses to apologise, its proposed repeal of the Act would be merely be a “evil ploy” to continue wielding the law’s powers under a different guise and form.

The DAP secretary-general noted that many provisions in the Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill still infringe basic human rights although the element of “detention without trial” is scrapped.

“Is BN ready to openly apologise to all victims of the ISA?”

“As long as it refuses to do so to seek closure, it raises doubt that abolishing the ISA today is merely a game and an evil ploy to continue using the Act but in a different guise and form,” he told the House when debating the Bill.

“This black mark of the ISA in our history must be buried forever and this cannot be done if the government does not apologise and guarantee that such iron-fisted laws like the ISA will not be repeated,” he added.

Lim related to the House his personal experience under the 1960 law that was enacted to fight the communist insurgency, noting that he had only been 26-years old and just elected as the Kota Melaka MP during his 1987 detention.

“Even at this raw age, I was accused of threatening national security... at my age of 52 today, am I not a greater threat then?” he asked.

During his detention, Lim continued, he was interrogated repeatedly and pushed to admit that he was involved in “subversive” activities.

“The 60-day solitary confinement process is difficult to endure because our lives are placed in the hands of just a few police officers who could do whatever they want with me,” he said.

“I was placed in a small blue room without mirrors and a fan that did not move.

“I was not allowed to sleep for more than 24 hours and made to sit on a bench. A police officer would shout in my ear every time I [was] about to fall asleep, forcing me to repent,” he related.

"But I was among the lucky ones because I was not beaten violently like what was done to our Opposition Leader (Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) and many others," he said.

The Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill, proposed to replace the ISA, removes the government's power to detain a person indefinitely without trial and reduces the maximum detention period from two years to 28 days.

The newly-proposed Bill is among the slew of legislative reforms mooted by the Najib administration as a part of its promise to increase civil freedom.

Joining his Pakatan Rakyat (PR) partners in opposing certain provisions in the Bill, Lim pointed out today that the police are still accorded arbitrary powers to arrest a person for up to 28 days based on mere suspicion that he or she had committed a security offence.

This, he said, infringes upon a person's rights under the Federal Constitution.

"If any person can be detained for 28 days without being brought before a magistrate, where is the guarantee that this person would not be tortured by the police during this period?

"And who can endure torture for 28 days? Why is the government and police so afraid to bring this person before a magistrate?" he said.

Lim also pointed to another provision in the Bill that allows for a public prosecutor, through an oral application to court, to keep an accused under remand for the full term of his or her trial, until all avenues of appeal are exhausted.

"Elements of the ISA still exist in this Bill," he said.

"By continuing to instil fear amongst the people, there is false liberty or no liberty at all, but BN continues to exercise tyranny over Malaysians."

Debate on the Bill continues tomorrow.

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