

Govt says will consider releasing ISA detainees
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 17 – Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein pledged today to “look into the possibility” of releasing those currently detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA), once its replacement law comes into force.

He noted that this was in the spirit of the new law, the Security Offences (Special Measures) Bill that was passed by the Dewan Rakyat this afternoon, which provides for the repeal of the 52-year-old ISA.

“So on that spirit, it is very important for us to look at those who are presently being detained... to see whether it is possible for us to release them as quick as possible.

“... and the criteria will always be in the interest of national security and public interest,” Hishammuddin (picture) told a press conference in Parliament today.

The Sembrong MP, however, added that the government “will have to see” whether those who would not be released would be tried in court for their alleged offences.

“I will have to look at each and every case,” he said.

When tabling the new security law for second reading yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had said that the repeal of the ISA “will not affect” those currently detained under the law.

“Let it be known that even though this Bill repeals the ISA 1960, the Bill will not affect the detention of persons currently under detention, unless their detention orders are revoked by the Home Minister,” he had told the House.

The new security law seeks to replace the highly-criticised ISA and is a part of the government’s slew of reforms aimed at increasing civil liberties.

Among others, the Bill removes the government’s right to detain a person without trial and reduces the maximum detention period from two years to 28 days.

Opposition lawmakers and civil society groups have long rallied for the ISA to be repealed, claiming that it infringes on basic human rights and denies a person the right to fair trial.

Hishammuddin added today that all those kept under the just-lifted three Emergency Ordinances have also been released.

“When we abolished the ordinances before this, there were also those detained and under purview of the ordinances... they have now been released... which the public does not know.

"That, I will explain in about a week or so when we look at all the transformation we done in respect of Political Transformation Programme," he said.

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