

Dr M backs ISA repeal, but says law wasn't misused
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 19 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad today threw his weight behind Datuk Seri Najib Razak's plan to repeal the Internal Security Act (ISA), but denied that the law was abused as a tool to silence political opposition and dissent.

"Not all of those who opened their mouth were immediately detained under the ISA... and the perception that there was no freedom in Malaysia was also not correct," the former prime minister was quoted saying in a Bernama Online report today.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Najib announced a slew of reforms to press and security laws, including the repeal of the ISA that allows for indefinite detention without trial.

The ISA will, however, be replaced by two laws to deal with terrorism.

A colonial-era law designed to deal with the communist insurgency of the period, the ISA gained infamy during the 1987 Operasi Lalang crackdown during the Mahathir administration, when two dailies were closed along with two weekly newspapers and 106 people held without trial.

Today, Dr Mahathir said Putrajaya's decision to repeal the ISA put Malaysia on "higher moral ground" compared to countries like the United Kingdom and the United States.

"Previously, they criticised Malaysia purportedly for being cruel, detaining people without trial, but they are the ones doing it now," said the former prime minister.

Dr Mahathir later warned that the repeal of the security law may give rise to "extremists" who he said would take advantage of the new space for their own agendas.

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