

## **Pak Lah warns Najib of internal resistance to reforms**

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**By Shannon Teoh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 19 — Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today that Datuk Seri Najib Razak should expect hardliners in Barisan Nasional (BN) to resist his plans to repeal the Internal Security Act (ISA) and other security laws because they want to maintain the old ways to silence critics.

The former prime minister, who was conferred Universiti Malaysia Kelantan's first honorary doctorate today, said in his acceptance speech that his own efforts to implement reforms were "opposed not just by those outside but also those from within."

"There are hardliners who want to maintain the old system, controlling the flow of information and using laws to silence the public. Najib may face the same challenges I did before. The job of a reformist is not easy.

"I hope there will not be those that oppose silently, 'seperti gunting dalam lipatan', as the policy that (Najib) wants to create with the repeal of the ISA will benefit the public and the nation in the long term," Abdullah (picture) said, using the Malay idiom that refers to internal saboteurs.

PM Najib had announced last Thursday the repeal of the ISA, the three Emergency Declarations and also the need for annual printing and publishing permits when both Dewan Negara and Dewan Rakyat have their next sitting.

The Umno president said the new laws will be enacted to protect the peace, harmony and security of the country but admitted that they were "risky but necessary for our survival."

Najib replaced Abdullah in April 2009 with the promise of reviewing the ISA but has now done away with the security law completely in what appears to be a drastic move to win back middle Malaysia.

But critics have warned that the BN chief will face pressure from right-wing elements within Umno and other lobby groups such as Perkasa.

Abdullah came into power in 2003, also with the promise of liberal reforms, but only delivered his reform package after the 2008 general election which saw BN fail to secure its customary two-thirds majority of Parliament, leading to his resignation a year later.

The Abdullah administration passed the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC), Judicial Appointments Commission and Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission Acts just months before he stepped down despite criticism that they were watered-down.

The MACC especially has been repeatedly accused of being biased against Pakatan Rakyat (PR) while two deaths in custody including that of a DAP aide have further dented its credibility.

Abdullah said today that even though some had blamed the 2008 election losses — which also saw BN ceding five state governments — on him for allowing too much freedom, "I

have never regretted it as this is a basic human right.”

“To me, any rational and civilised society will one day be able to filter lies and deceit from truth and sincerity,” he said, adding that he was proud of Najib for “continuing the government’s pursuit of basic human rights.”

Putrajaya’s reform package was seen by political observers as a bid to reclaim middle Malaysia after the disastrous handling of the July 9 Bersih rally that saw the Najib administration being widely criticised in the international media just as he was pitching the country to foreign investors.

The latest survey from local pollster Merdeka Center has also showed that Najib’s popularity slid to 59 per cent this August from the 79 per cent high in May 2010, fuelled by rising concerns over the surge in living costs and the Bersih clampdown.

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