

**What more reforms do Malaysians want? Dr M asks
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By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 26 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad appeared today to suggest that government has done its best to reform the country and reinvent itself, even asking, "What more reforms do you want?"

Dr Mahathir, who served as prime minister for 22 years during his time, pointed out that Umno has pandered to many of the public's demands for greater civil freedom apart from staying true to its objectives of protecting the welfare of the "nation, race and religion".

"What reforms you want them to accelerate? You asked them to remove the ISA (Internal Security Act), they took it off... you asked them to support all kinds of things which we never supported before and we have.

"At one time, you remember in this country we cannot have lion or dragon dances but now, we allow. And we give money to churches... so what more reforms you want?

"You tell us... I will convey to the prime minister and he will immediately do it," he said.

He added that Barisan Nasional (BN) has also ensured inclusiveness, dispelling criticisms that Umno's partners in the ruling coalition were subservient to the Malay party.

"We have first three parties — MCA, MIC, Umno; then we accepted Sabah and Sarawak parties, and then after the May 13 tragedy, we accepted PPP, Gerakan and even PAS.

"So how much more inclusiveness do we want?" he asked.

But Dr Mahathir also noted that despite Umno's efforts, the opposition would never admit that the government has done enough.

He said that even if BN retains Putrajaya in the coming polls, the opposition would likely insist that its performance was unsatisfactory.

Dr Mahathir declined to comment when asked if he felt that the time was now ripe for elections to be held, only saying that the decision was up to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak to decide.

The Najib government embarked on a whirlwind of reforms over the past year of its administration, agreeing to relax restrictive laws and earning bouquets for slackening its leash on civil freedoms.

In the span of two Dewan Rakyat sittings and about six months earlier this year, the government had pushed through a record number of critical amendments to laws long described as draconian by civil society groups and those in the opposition camp.

Key among these was the repeal of the Internal Security Act (ISA), the 1960 anti-Communist insurgency law that critics have accused the government of misusing to threaten and quell opposition dissent.

A new legislation, the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act, was introduced in its place, removing the government's power under the ISA to detain a person indefinitely without trial.

Last November, both Houses of Parliament approved the Peaceful Assembly Act 2011, a fresh law mooted by the government to permit public gatherings after the authorities arrested over 1,600 individuals and sprayed tear gas and chemical-laced water to disperse what had been a peaceful Bersih 2.0 rally for free and fair elections last July 9.

The government has also lifted the over four-decade-old ban on student participation in politics after approving amendments to the highly-criticised University and University Colleges Act 1971.

Adding to the growing list, Dewan Rakyat also agreed earlier this year to nominally loosen government control over media freedom by passing amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984.

Despite the Bill's harried manner of approval and uproar from the opposition bench, the amendment effectively clips Putrajaya's wings over the granting of publishing permits and scraps the annual permit renewal requirement earlier imposed on publications in the PPPA.

Other significant legislative reforms include earlier amendments to the Police Act, the repeal of the Banishment Act 1959 and Restricted Residence Act 1933, the lifting of three Emergency Declarations and the tabling of the Malaysia Volunteers Corps (RELA) Bill 2012 – a new law that removes the organisation’s powers of arrest and firearms possession.

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