

Penang chief minister wants repeal of detention law

A senior Malaysian politician has spoken in favour of repealing the stringent Internal Security Act (ISA) that the government says is needed to maintain public order and fight terrorism.

It is not possible to review the ISA to make it more human rights compliant as the act itself is 'evil', said Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng of Penang state.

Lim, who is also Democratic Action Party (DAP) secretary general, said those who want the act reviewed are 'deceiving either themselves or the public'.

Responding to a proposal by his predecessor Koh Tsu Koon that a parliamentary select committee be set up to look into the review of the act, Lim said the act was 'already bad' and could therefore not be reviewed.

'There are no two ways about it. It should be abolished altogether. Trying to review this act is like trying to turn Satan into good,' he was quoted as saying in The Sun newspaper Monday.

Lim is a former ISA detainee. One of his party legislators, M. Manoharan, an ISA detainee, was sworn in while in detention earlier this month after he won the March election.

Manoharan, 46, legal advisor of the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf) and four Hindraf leaders - P. Uthayakumar, 46, V. Ganabatirau, 34, R. Kengadharan, 40, and K. Vasantha Kumar, 34 - are serving two-year detention terms under ISA after they organised a protest rally last November.

Hindraf claims to speak for Malaysia's two million-plus Tamil Hindus and alleges that they are discriminated against in jobs and education.

Lim said the state government would continue to press for the abolition of the ISA and the Printing Presses and Publications Act, under which the media is sought to be curbed, on grounds that they were against human rights.

'Everyone has the right of freedom of opinion and expression, and although there are arguments that sensitive issues should not be discussed openly, silence and closed doors over these issues will only promote distrust and frustration,' he said.

Only through the exchange of views in a mature and responsible manner could people understand and embrace their differences, Lim added.

'The government is obliged to ensure peace and security of the country but it should not be permitted to do so at the expense of basic principles of human rights and natural justice.'

The DAP MPs will continue to bring it up in parliament, he said.

'If all else fails, we shall have to wait for a change in the federal government for this (abolition of ISA) to happen.'

The government of Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says the law is needed to combat

terrorism and cites similar laws in the US, Britain and elsewhere in support of its argument.

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