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Cabinet nod augurs well for constructive engagement

AAT

TWO Cabinet Ministers gave separate briefings to members of the media yesterday.

They are the Rural Development Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid and Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Other ministers are making preparations for a similar exercise from their end.

In the next few weeks, key members from the media may receive invitation to attend these briefings, thus making the exercise a more complete and comprehensive one.

The briefings followed a Cabinet decision that Ministers and their ministries get closer to the media in a constructive engagement.

Not that the media, albeit those in the mainstream, are unfriendly and uncooperative.

But the Cabinet feels that updating the media with the ministries' plans and programmes would go a long way towards realising their potential.

Equally important, engaging the media in a regular and structured dialogue may also yield important feedback.

Such feedback is crucial in the effective implementation of projects initiated by the ministries concerned.

Sometimes, the more negative side of the feedback is not highlighted by those entrusted with the execution of these plans and programmes.

A vigilant media can offer such feedback. A media that understands the concerns of the ministries and agencies under them can also help by way of proper information dissemination.

An uninformed media can be counter productive, in fact just as counter productive as the misguided ones.

Some ministers and those heading agencies under them should take a leaf from the way the country's Chief Executive Officer interacts with the media.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, busy as ever, would still find some time to interact with the media.

The same can be said of his deputy, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

In fact, several other ministers are known to be media friendly, to the point that media access to them is free from bureaucratic red tape and unnecessary screening.

Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo goes even further.

He has made available his cellular telephone number not only to the media but to the public as well.

The good thing is he answers calls made to his mobile telephone.

From the media perspective, it is very encouraging to see the Cabinet taking a proactive position in such briefing and de-briefing exercises.

Every Wednesday, key civil servants from ministries get to attend the weekly post-Cabinet meeting to learn about important decisions made.

The post-Cab, as it is popularly referred to, is done on a need-to-know basis. Meaning, only selected officers are privy of the decisions, positions or arguments made by the Cabinet.

In the early years of Dr Mahathir's administration, he used to give regular Cabinet Press conferences which were meant for reporters to obtain items for news.

This was then fine tuned where ministers give their weekly Press conferences.

With this latest directive by the Cabinet, it is hoped that such constructive engagement would bring benefits not just to both parties but also to the nation as a whole.

Ministries, however, should make a distinction between a Press or Media conference and a briefing (taklimat).

A Press or media conference is for news generation purposes while a briefing need not necessarily be so.