

16 FEB 2001

Malaysiakini-Zainuddin

MALAYSIAKINI WANTS TO MEET ZAINUDDIN ON ALLEGATIONS

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 16 (Bernama) -- Malaysiakini.com wants to meet Information Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Zainuddin Maidin over his allegations about the credibility of the online news portal.

In a statement today, Malaysiakini chief executive officer Premesh Chandran said Zainuddin had been hurling "unfounded allegations" against the news organisation questioning its credibility and funding sources.

It said that Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) was also being used to launch attacks against Malaysiakini in the past week.

" If Zainuddin has doubts about our credibility, we are prepared to meet him in person to explain," Chandran said.

He also denied reports over RTM and the press that Malaysiakini had refused to answer questions from journalists.

In questioning Malaysiakini's credibility, RTM reported yesterday that its editor Steven Gan's expose on the deaths of 59 inmates in the Semenyih illegal immigrants detention camp in 1995 was false.

Chandran said the expose was based on facts and RTM in stating that only nine people died in the incident was actually referring to another unrelated incident.

He said Gan won a Malaysian Press Institute award in 1996 for the expose which reported that the illegal immigrants had died of various diseases while at the detention centre.

Gan, who was then working with The Sun newspaper, and his team had received the award from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Chandran said, adding that RTM was referring to the 1998 riot in the detention centre by illegal immigrants when the government tried to deport them.

He said Malaysiakini had a clear policy that legal action for libel and defamation was detrimental to freedom of speech and should be pursued as the last court of action, and not the first.

" We believe that all efforts should be made to correct and clarify reports rather than utilising legal channels to seek damages. Nevertheless, we will take the necessary action in cases where the parties continue to make unfounded allegations," he added.

Chandran had earlier said that Malaysiakini was financed by a mix of different sources and not by American financier George Soros' foundation, as reported by the Far Eastern Economic Review in its Feb 8 issue.

-- BERNAMA

AU AU RYN