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Zam: We need balanced reports

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - Information Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Zainuddin Maidin has urged Malaysiakini.com to give balanced reports so as to enjoy public confidence.

"I do not expect them to support the Government but they also should not be looked upon as perennially anti-government," he said after meeting three Malaysiakini officials at his office. They were editor-in-chief Steven Gan, news editor Fathi Aris Omar and chief executive officer Premesh Chandran.

Zainuddin said the content of the Internet newspaper should also have integrity and credibility.

"If Malaysiakini has credibility, it can also survive as a website well supported by advertisers in the country," he said.

Today's meeting followed a media row between Zainuddin and Malaysiakini which prompted Gan to write to Zainuddin seeking an appointment to explain the running of the news portal.

Zainuddin reportedly said last month that Malaysiakini was barred from covering media conferences by Malaysian Ministers not because it was critical of the Government but because its credibility was questionable.

The Far Eastern Economic Review said in its Feb 8 issue that Malaysiakini was among media organisations receiving aid from George Soros' Open Society Fund.

Zainuddin said the meeting was amicable, candid and frank. "I was happy to hear them stating their commitment to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's vision and the national vision."

On Malaysiakini's complaint that its reporters could not cover assignments as they were not issued Press accreditation, Zainuddin said it should not use that as an excuse for not coming up with balanced reports.

When approached after the meeting Gan said, ministry about a year ago rejected Malaysiakini's application for Press accreditation for its reporters as it did not have a publication licence.

"The Ministry will have to update its policy on Press cards for Malaysiakini given the fact that we are Internet journalists."

According to him, Zainuddin had agreed to look into that matter.

While stressing Malaysiakini's independence, Gan said it was important that its reporters have Press credentials so that they could report on what the Government has to say.

"Datuk (Zainuddin) wants us to be less critical. I think our position is that we are an independent media ... we will continue to criticise where necessary."

Gan gave the assurance that Malaysiakini writers would continue to be balanced in their reporting with regard to opinions.

On Malaysiakini's funding and Soros' involvement, Gan said the matter was discussed briefly.

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