

12 MAR 2001

Zainuddin-M'siakini

ZAINUDDIN HOPES M'SIAKINI MAINTAIN BALANCE AND CREDIBILITY

KUALA LUMPUR, March 12 (Bernama) -- Information Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Zainuddin Maidin has urged the on-line news portal 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 told reporters after meeting three Malaysiakini officials at his office, namely 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, they 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.

To substantiate this he referred to a Feb 8 edition of the Far Eastern Economic Review which carried an interview quoting international financier George Soros as saying that Malaysiakini was among media organisations receiving aid from Soros' Open Society Fund.

Zainuddin said today's meeting, which lasted 90 minutes, was amicable, candid and frank.

"I am happy to hear them stating their commitment to (Prime Minister) Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's vision and the national vision," he said.

Zainuddin said that presently the people regarded Malaysiakini as an anti-establishment Internet news portal.

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.

Asked whether the meeting discussed Malaysiakini's funding by Soros, Zainuddin said: "I told them let bygones be bygones, let us start a new era. These issues should not stop us from cooperating."

When approached after the meeting, Gan said the group raised the issue of press credentials for Malaysiakini reporters.

According to him, the ministry about a year ago rejected Malaysiakini's application for press accreditation for its reporters as it did not have a publication licence.

"As an internet web site, you don't need to get a publication licence. Somehow the ministry will have to update their policy on press card for Malaysiakini especially given the fact that we are internet journalists," Gan said.

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

While stressing that Malaysiakini would continue to be an independent media, Gan said it was important that its reporters have press credentials so that they could also report on what the government had 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 in regards to opinions.

"We would allow them to continue to express opinions based on proper facts," he said.

Asked whether the meeting also discussed Malaysiakini's funding and Soros' involvement, Gan said the matter was discussed briefly.

-- BERNAMA

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