

**Don't quote websites and blogs, media told
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The Internal Security Ministry has warned mainstream newspapers in the country against quoting and publishing "anti-government articles" from online portals and blogs.

The March 13 letter, which was sent to the country's top editors, was signed by the ministry's Publications Control and Al-Quran Texts Unit senior officer Che Din Yusof, on behalf of the ministry's secretary-general.

Malaysiakini has obtained a copy of the circular from a source.

The ministry reminded newspapers that under Section 8A(2) of the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, it is the responsibility of newspaper editors to take reasonable steps to ensure the correctness and truth of news before publishing them.

"As a responsible newspaper, the owner must observe the principles and code of ethics of journalism, which among others is to ensure that every news report must have a sound and proper basis.

"It would not be advisable for a mainstream newspaper to play on public sentiments and deliberately go against the basic principles of journalism as this could undermine stability and national security."

Such an action, the letter stressed, would not be in conformity with the "principles of openness and truth as desired by the government".

In the circular, the Internal Security Ministry also reminded mainstream newspapers not to publish or "give any consideration whatsoever" to online articles which are found to have no basis at all, or based on mere speculation.

In a thinly veiled threat, newspapers are reminded that condition 11 of their publishing permit requires them "to follow and not to act against" such directives issued by the ministry.

'Soviet-style control'

The circular also stated that the ministry had observed an inclination on the part of mainstream newspapers to quote and publish articles from online news portals and blogs.

This would appear to suggest that these newspapers tended to give credence to the issues raised by such websites.

Over the past few weeks, websites and blogs have highlighted allegations of corruption against ACA chief Zulkipli Mat Noor and Internal Security Deputy Minister Mohd Johari Baharum.

Commenting on the matter, a Sarawak university don described the ministry's latest circular to mainstream newspapers as a "Soviet-style management" of the country's media.

"They are doing this because they are in crisis," he said, adding that the government is scared of the exposes on corruption and abuse of power on the Internet.

He said the ministry's directive is a reflection how pathetically insipid the government has become.

The academician lamented, "When the whole world is moving forward, we are taking a retrogressive step."

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