

Gov't won't suppress cyberspace, says PM
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Recognising the impact of the Internet and online social networking which could even topple a government, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said the government will not suppress the cyberspace but instead will engage this global change.

Najib also revealed that the government is still studying the proposed amendment to the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) and has yet to reach a final decision.

He told some 200 members of the audience, mostly senators, this morning during his opening speech for a forum at the Parliament banquet hall, that he is "not as lucky" as his predecessors because he has to face many new challenges after he took over the office in 2009, and one of them is the rise of online social networking.

"Now social networking is used to attack and defame anyone. It can even be used to topple a government. The government has no monopoly over information and the dissemination of information.

"To me, we only have two choices: whether we try to control it or we try to manage and engage the global change. We chose to make Malaysia a progressive country," he said.

He reiterated the guarantee given by the government not to censor the Internet when the Multimedia Super Corridor project was introduced.

"It is okay (to give the guarantee) but it means more challenges in term of politics compared to the past.

"But God willing we can manage the challenge, we have the will power to manage it."

Later, when asked about the no-Internet-censorship guarantee during a press conference, Najib was quick to add that it does not mean Internet users are above the laws.

"But you cannot break the laws. There are laws against sedition and all that. The laws are clear. That's why I said respecting the constitution which means respect the law as well... As long as you operate within the ambit of the law, that's fine."

When further asked about the proposal to amend the PPPA to include online media, Najib said the government is still studying it and has yet to reach any decision.

Last month Home Ministry secretary-general Mahmood Adam was quoted by news reports as saying that the PPPA will be amended to expand its scope and include 'publications' posted online and plug loopholes.

His announcement evoked strong criticism from civil society and media organisations, warning that it would further suppress the limited freedom of expression in the country.

Following the protests, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Liew Vui Keong later said there is no indication that any amendment will be made to the PPPA during the March sitting of Parliament.

'There is democracy in Malaysia'

In his opening speech, Najib said the government should not be apologetic over the democracy in Malaysia. There is democracy in Malaysia. Sometimes I think too much of democracy but it is okay. "Some said there is no debate but look at their ceramah, they have ceramah every single night. Look who are being attacked in cyberspace?"

Although no name was mentioned, Najib was obviously referring to opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim's debate challenge to Najib which he has rejected. "Isn't that democracy? Isn't that the openness of our society?" He then pointed out that the defeat suffered by BN in the 2008 general election is another example of Malaysia's democracy.

"We lost five states and two-third majority in the Parliament, isn't that democracy?" But he was quick to add, "but please give us a better result in the next general election", which drew a round of laughter from the audience.

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