

Putrajaya directed media to attack 'Buku Jingga'

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EXCLUSIVE An internal memo leaked from Utusan Malaysia appears to point to the possibility that Putrajaya and Umno have a major say in the daily's editorial direction.

The internal memo dated March 21, obtained by Malaysiakini, states that the Prime Minister's Department had issued a special directive to all news organisations to attack two key documents of the opposition coalition Pakatan Rakyat.

The first is Pakatan's joint policy statement, better known as the Buku Jingga (Orange Book), and a list of immediate reforms it has pledged to implement within 100 days of taking over the federal administration.

According to a Utusan source, the internal memo was issued after a briefing at the PM's office, where participants were informed that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak would broach on the two documents in his speech the next day, March 22.

The memo states that the premier will speak about the "negative effects" of Pakatan's pledges and policies stated in Buku Jingga.

Najib's speech at PICC

It adds that all news organisations are to source comments from several groups, including BN party leaders, economists and academicians to support Najib's claims.

These comments can be published in stages beginning tomorrow until Sunday," says the internal memo, which was written by one of Utusan's senior journalists.

During that period, beginning on March 23, Utusan published at least seven articles on the topic, all of which based on Najib's speech delivered at the 12th Civil Service Premier Gathering at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre.

In his speech, Najib said election pledges come in documents printed in various colours and the latest was now orange, which he said was filled with populist policies that would bankrupt the country in the long term.

In follow-up reports, Utusan sourced comments from BN leaders such as Rural and Regional Development Minister Mohd Shafie Apdal, Information, Communications and Culture Minister Rais Yatim and MIC Youth chief T Mohan.

'Agenda set by Umno'

During the period mentioned in the internal memo, Utusan also carried comments from academician Chandra Muzaffar, USM lecturer Sivamurugan Pandian and also published similarly toned commentaries from the daily's stable of columnists, including Awang Selamat.

Allegations of government interference in Utusan's editorial policies have been a common allegation of opposition leaders, as well as National Union of Journalists (NUJ) president Hata Wahari, who was a senior journalist with the daily until his recent sacking.

A report by Free Malaysia Today (FMT) on Wednesday quoted Hata as saying that Utusan's editorial direction is decided by Umno's political bureau, chaired by Najib, during meetings held on Mondays.

Hata said the newspaper's weekly agenda would be communicated through the Prime Minister's

Department and Utusan would run an issue for three days, unless it receives strong responses.

Once other news organisations pick up on the issue, Utusan would then be free to start writing on other issues, reported FMT.

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