

Pakatan, BN leaders: Home Ministry too lenient
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Both sides of the political divide joined forces to cry foul over what they saw as double standard by the Home Ministry in dealing with the potentially dangerous article on an alleged Christian conspiracy by Utusan Malaysia.

In statements today, leaders from the BN and the Pakatan said the reprimand letter was a mere slap on the wrist compared to actions taken against other members of the media in recent years.

Both sides called for the heads of the Malay daily's editors and for the suspension of its printing and publication permit.

"It is despicable that Utusan, which is owned by Umno, published this made-up story based on the wild allegations of two Umno bloggers who provided no evidence whatsoever.

"And yet Utusan has escaped unpunished by Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein, who is also the Umno vice president.

"The letter of caution issued by Hishammuddin to Utusan Malaysia is a pathetic excuse for a censure because it does not commensurate at all with the gravity of Utusan's crime of publishing lies to pit Muslims against Christians in this country," said DAP Selangor chief Teresa Kok in a strongly worded statement today.

Kok (left) added that the ministry has a track record of action against the media, citing the arrest of Sin Chew Daily reporter under the Internal Security Act in 2008, for reporting allegedly racist statements by an Umno leader, among others.

Concurring with her, Gerakan vice president Mah Siew Keong said that he has also received many public complaints about the ministry's leniency.

"Many NGO leaders have called me to complain that a reprimand letter is too mild in view of the seriousness of the problem. Articles like this create tension and cause disharmony," he said.

He added that Gerakan is "disappointed" with the decision not to mete out a heavier penalty.

Najib's shadow play

Meanwhile, PAS central committee member Husam Musa (left) slammed Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak for using the issue to portray himself as a moderate leader.

"On one hand, Utusan acts on Umno's behalf, using fear psychology so that the Malays will continue to support Umno/BN... just like the crucifix issue used against Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah leading up to the 1990 election.

"But when the matter backfired, and Utusan is now rejected by the majority of the rakyat, the PM takes a middle ground moderate approach.

"This hypocrisy in dealing with such a sensitive issue is proven by the fact that no stern action has been taken against Utusan," he said in a statement today.

In a barrage of tweets yesterday, MCA Youth chief Wee Ka Siong had said that the Utusan article lacks common sense and that responsible parties in the Umno-owned paper should have been let go or suspended.

"I don't know the identity of bloggers or reporter who wrote the report - whether they are Chinese, Malay or Indian, it doesn't matter. Wrong is wrong, regardless of race and position!

"It doesn't matter who owns the paper, punishment must be imposed on journalist based on mistakes committed," he tweeted, advocating sacking or suspension of the reporter and editor.

His statements echoed BN Youth chief Khairy Jamaluddin yesterday who took on the blogger quoted by Utusan in their controversial report on twitter over the case.

This included a lengthy spat of angry name-calling, with Khairy (left) claiming that even an arrest under the draconian Internal Security Act would be too kind for blogger Zakhir Mohamad.

Mah, on the other hand, said that he had received many complains about the apparent leniency of the action.

"Many NGOs have called me to complain that a reprimand letter is too mild in view of seriousness of the problem. Articles like this create tension and cause disharmony," he said.

According to DAP's Serdang parliamentarian Teo Nie Ching, last year, the editor-in-chief of Chinese-language newspaper China Press was slapped with a two-week suspension over the daily's 'inaccurate report' on the resignation of inspector-general of police Musa Hassan.

"The error (by Utusan is)... far more dangerous and insidious than the mistake made by China Press. Yet, Utusan was let off with merely a warning from the Ministry.

"Why has no stern action been taken against the chief editor and the journalist who wrote the article?" asked Teo.

The daily had also published a four-paragraph apology on its front page.

tan hoon cheng 04 120908In 2008, gutsy Sin Chew Daily senior journalist Tan Hoon Cheng (left) was arrested under Internal Security Act for her four-paragraph direct reporting of a speech by Umno Bukit Bendera division chairman Ahmad Ismail in the Permatang Pauh by-election ceramah on Aug 23, where he referred to the Chinese in Malaysia as "penumpang".

The damage, chaos and ill will caused by the latest the irresponsible and inaccurate report by Utusan Malaysia was beyond description, to the extent that Najib was forced to meet with the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) over the issue at Putrajaya yesterday.

This was the first time the group had been engaged in this way and such a meeting in itself is evidence of the unhappiness among the Christian community and the reckless danger of playing up such issues.