

**'Diambil' wake-up call for Najib
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I read with amusement that news portals were not included in the media consultative council, mooted to be jointly-headed by Information, Communications and Culture Minister Rais Yatim and Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein.

Instead of having Malaysiakini, Malaysian Insider and Free Malaysia Today - all very popular news sites - as representatives of new media, the government proposal included Blog House, a bloggers' association.

This is not surprising as the government still obviously thinks of new media as consisting of blogs.

It's also worth mentioning that Blog House's committee members include pro-government bloggers, the most famous of whom is former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad.

So typical of the government to play it safe when it comes to media. In any event, the top editors of print media chose to skip the inaugural closed-door meeting with the government to discuss the development of such a council.

Someone should tell the powers-that-be that suppressing the mainstream media is self-defeating because it only serves to make the mainstream media less and less credible when it comes to political news.

These days, whenever there is an election of some kind, where do people go to for the latest updates? They don't check out Bernama's website, that's for sure. They don't even go to mainstream newspaper sites. Instead, they go to the very online media sites that were excluded from the meeting.

Even blogs now dinosaurs

When people want to see scenes of rallies and demonstrations, where do they go to for the latest video footage? RTM? You must be kidding. They go straight to YouTube.

And when they want an citizen's account of what happened where do they go to? Blogs? That's so yesterday.

These days, people just log in to Facebook and Twitter and get it direct from the horses' mouths. Then they either "Like" or "Retweet" the items to spread them virally through their networks.

One would have thought that the government got its rude awakening after the historic March 8, 2008 general elections.

In the lead-up to that one, mainstream media were reduced to being little more than a cheerleading squad for the government.

As the mainstream newspapers demonised the opposition, while at the same time singing praises of the government, the voting public simply skipped through the political pages and headed straight for the Internet to get the real news.

But did the government learn anything? Apparently not, if reports about supposed government guidelines to media companies, on how to demonise Bersih, are to be believed.

On the same old treadmill

The guidelines are so incredibly lame, it's hard to imagine they could be real. In fact, some of the points are hilarious. Here are three choice examples:

* Pre-empt chaos and disorder (fear paradigm). The "show of force" by UMNO or silat groups well before July 9 may be imperative to deter demonstrators

* The media to use less of the same old faces (eg Zul Nordin, Zahrain, Ibrahim Ali) as "attack dogs." Try to tap fresh faces (eg BN Youth leaders, some NGOs and,

* Friendly bloggers and cybertroopers will continued to be mobilised.

I'm convinced the guidelines were either drafted by a brilliant satirist or some government servant stuck in a time warp.

But even if the leaked guidelines are bogus, if you bother to look at the advisory points in detail, it's amazing how much of it was indeed reflected in the mainstream media's coverage of Bersih.

I recently finished teaching a semester-long course on "Integrated Media Publishing" at a local private university.

In it, I taught my students the different types of media platforms that exist today and how useless it is to try to control the media in this digital age that we live in.

I also taught them that nobody - not companies, not governments, not even the police - can control social media.

This very basic lesson is something that Prime Minister Najib Razak NONEarned the hard way just a few days ago with the Diamlah episode where people used his own official Facebook Page to tell him to "shut up".

The most remarkable thing about this is not just how many people posted "Diamlah" but the fact that with Facebook, your identify can be seen. People are no longer afraid. This is 2011 not the 1980s.

Scare tactics, cybertroopers, censorship - such things don't work any more. Someone seriously needs to tell the prime minister that.

Then again, after the Diamlah episode, he probably already realises it. Then, again, maybe not.

Note: This is my last Malaysiakini tech article as this column is being discontinued. I'll be taking a short break in August but to quote Arnold, "I'll be back", in some platform or another. Thanks for reading!

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