

Najib's media reforms a fraud, says lawyer
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Opposition leaders are continuing to pick at Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's much-publicised promises of reforms made during his live Malaysia Day speech last Thursday.

PKR vice-president N Surendran has called Najib's reforms a "fraud" despite the premier's promise to encourage press freedom, citing recent developments "that show otherwise".

Surendran referred to Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein's statement that "security" would still be the main concern in issuing permits for newspapers and publications under the new reforms.

"This is clear proof that the PM's purported reforms are nothing but a massive fraud upon the rakyat.

"While the PM makes fantastical promises to make Malaysia the 'best democracy', newspapers, editors and journalists will remain at the absolute mercy of the Home Ministry," the lawyer and rights activist added in a statement today.

Hishammuddin's statement, Surendren believes, is proof that the current absolute discretion to grant and revoke publishing permits will be retained, which makes nonsense of the prime minister's promise of democratisation.

Furthermore, he lamented, no pledge had been made to repeal Section 8(A) of the Printing Press and Publications Act 1984, which makes it a criminal offence to publish "false news", which he described as akin to "a Sword of Damocles" over the heads of journalists and editors.

This, Sundren said, confirmed fears that the government intended to continue using false and specious excuses such as 'security' to deny permits to publications critical of the BN, as it had conveniently and consistently done so.

'Present full blueprint'

As an example of the government having no real intention to liberalise media laws and allow real freedom of the press in this country, Surendren brought up the Home Ministry's refusal to reinstate the suspended licence of the PKR organ, Suara Keadilan.

Meanwhile, DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang challenged Najib to present a full blueprint, when Parliament reconvenes on Oct 3, on how he proposes to make Malaysia the "best democracy in the world" with democratic laws and truly independent institutions.

"This will be an acid test as to whether he is serious about the repeal of the ISA and other draconian laws to make Malaysia the 'best democracy in the world'," Lim said in a statement.

He said Malaysians should take seriously what Najib said in Pekan yesterday, and put him to the test as at present, Malaysia is among the "worst democracies in the world".

Lim said citizens are arrested for wearing yellow T-shirts and faced mass arrests and the firing of teargas and chemically-laced water cannons for supporting a peaceful rally in pursuit of a perfectly legitimate and democratic campaign for free and fair elections.

Malaysia, he added, could not be on the path to become the "best democracy in the world" without a total overhaul of undemocratic laws and reconstitution of key institutions in the country to ensure that they became independent, professional and incorruptible.

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