

Press freedom: What Najib doesn't want you to know
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The prime minister's outlandish attempt on Monday night to claim credit for Malaysia's press freedom ranking is a shocking display of insensitivity to the deaths of at least two Indonesian journalists, and the violence against others which caused the rankings of their countries to fall, and Malaysia's to rise.

Plainly ignoring the facts contained in Reporters Sans Frontieres' 2011-12 report, Najib Razak said: "Since I became prime minister, Malaysia has moved up nine places in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index..."

PM Najib Razak speaks to the press outside the gutted administrative block of Metro Tabernacle church. His brazen effrontery is sickening. The real reason for Malaysia's better showing is plain: other countries' ranking fell because of violence against journalists - Indonesia's ranking plunged by 29 places, and that of India and Bangladesh also dropped.

No, prime minister, Malaysia did not rise in the RSF rankings. The others fell because journalists were either killed or beaten up.

In Indonesia, at least two journalists died in an army crackdown in West Papua; five were kidnapped and 18 journalists assaulted.

"That was the main reason for Indonesia's plunge," says Reporters Sans Frontieres in the report to the press freedom index.

press freedom index rsf asia pacific 2000-12 "A corrupt judiciary that is too easily influenced by politicians and pressure groups and government attempts to control the media and Internet have prevented the development of a freer press.

"In Bangladesh, opposition groups and the ruling Awami League took turns to attack and obstruct the press. In India, journalists were exposed to violence in two states and threats from mafia groups in the main cities; the government also attempted to tighten controls on online media."

Conditions worsened in Indonesia, India, Bangladesh and Singapore. Conditions did not improve in Malaysia in 2011.

While the prime minister sought to mock the United States and Britain, he conveniently neglected to see that 10 small Asian countries rank superior to Malaysia in the RSF table.

Utusan allowed free reign

Najib's boasts about his commitment to press freedom must be weighed against the events in Malaysia in the past year, among which were:

- * Malaysiakini was again refused a newspaper licence.

- * A television cameraman died on duty in hostile conditions in a needless and showy adventure sponsored by a member of the Prime Minister's Department.

- * The home minister and the information minister went on a frolic of their own to try to co-opt the national mass media into becoming full-fledged government and BN stooges and propagandists.

* The information minister went on a spree issuing libel writs against sundry small bloggers.

* The Defence Ministry co-opted for its own ends a notorious blogger who had, with impunity, gleefully published clips from a video purportedly of a man resembling the opposition leader cavorting with a woman, purportedly a prostitute from China.

* Nanyang Siang Pau and The Star were hounded by the Home Ministry for errors that impinged on religious sensitivities, while Utusan Malaysia whipped up racial and religious tensions with abandon.

* The police hounded a young blogger who made facetious remarks about people in high places, based on reports already carried by other blogs and after he was fingered by pro-Umno bloggers.

* Media Prima took over the New Straits Times Press, and the prime minister's press secretary was appointed to a senior editorial position to supervise NSTP newspapers, further concentrating press ownership and control.

Against all that, it is laughable that the prime minister seeks to gain personal glory out of a niggardly and grudging concession to withdraw annual licensing of newspapers - still unfulfilled after six months, and in the fourth year of his term.

Najib is no different

To add further insult, Najib even claims credit for the existence of Malaysiakini and the Malaysian Insider - both of which were set up well before he became prime minister: Malaysiakini 10 years before, and the Insider in 2008, a year before Najib's government took office.

It is hilarious to hear Najib say, "I'm not naïve. I know that editors choose critical stories above positive ones... But there are always two sides to every story, and things are rarely as simple as they seem."

He must be truly NONEnaive if he cannot see that journalists write critical reports because politicians speak with forked tongues, and because it is the journalist's duty to give a complete and rounded report, and to call politicians to account.

Malaysian journalists, and the Malaysian public, are not so naive as to take politicians at their word, even less so when the words of the politician and the facts they conveniently disregard so often do not tally.

Quite plainly, despite his own words, Najib is no different from most other politicians in wanting to see only one side of the story, never mind the facts.

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