

Pak Lah: Now, there's no control over Utusan

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In his time, former premier Abdullah Ahmad Badawi would chide Umno-linked Malay language daily Utusan Malaysia when he felt it had crossed the line, but now feels there's "no longer any control over it".

An interview in the upcoming book 'Awakening: The Abdullah Badawi Years in Malaysia' revealed that Abdullah would sometimes call up the editor-in-chief if it went too far.

"Once, while my staff and I were discussing my Umno assembly speech, one of them pointed out that Utusan had published an editorial which smacked of racism and sedition. I read it and asked my head of communication Kamal Khalid to call the editor-in-chief," Abdullah said.

NONE"I told the editor that he had crossed the boundaries and if the police were to investigate and charge him for sedition, I would not interfere."

The daily stayed in line after he had put his foot down, Abdullah said.

He also during his administration, he gave the media a lot of freedom.

"In the News Straits Times, for example, I appointed Kalimullah (Hassan) (left), an experienced journalist, as editor-in-chief and during his time, he was critical of Umno and at times, even my leadership," the former prime minister explained.

Although several supreme council members were unhappy with Kalimullah's appointment and had subsequently requested for his removal, the sales of the newspapers increased, he said.

"Now, after he left, I understand that sales have fallen by close to half for the NST. The same is true with TV3.

"My former press secretary Kamarulzaman Zainal was heading it and its viewership for prime news shot up to three million. Now I am told, within the short space of two years, that viewership has fallen dramatically," he said.

Abdullah said he did not interfere in their work as he believed they had a job to perform as professionals and that he was merely giving them the space to do it.

"But when they abused their freedom by playing up racial and religious issues, like Utusan did, then I would call them and warn them," he said.

Abdullah's book will hit bookstands later this month and the former prime minister is scheduled to be present at the launch.

The book, published by Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Sird), contains articles on Abdullah and is edited by scholars Bridget Welsh and James Chin.

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