

'Pakatan suits have little effect on Utusan'

MalaysiaKini.com

Sept 4, 2013

By Lee Long Hui

Pakatan Rakyat's habit of suing Umno-owned Malay daily Utusan Malaysia for defamation, and frequently winning these suits, is a counter-productive move, noted former journalist Hata Wahari.

Hata (right), who once worked for the newspaper, claimed that its editors are not afraid of losing such suits and are only interested in whether the reports have achieved the desired effect.

"The bosses don't care if they lose a suit. What they look for is the impact of the article," he told about 50 people at a forum themed 'Understanding Utusan: Who is Awang Selamat?' in Kuala Lumpur on Monday.

He claimed that although Utusan Melayu Sdn Bhd makes losses, the parent company Utusan Melayu (Malaysia) Bhd is profitable through other subsidiaries and can afford to continue with their modus operandi.

"Every time (the DAP's) Lim Guan Eng wins a defamation suit (against Utusan), the Malays get angry. This is the reality. What kind of impact is it causing? (Money) is not a problem (for them)," he said.

"You should go to the rural areas where people are asking why Lim keeps winning (suits). Oi! This is the newspaper of the Malays (they would say)."

Hata, who was sacked after 16 years in the company, said he is saddened by "support" for the newspaper by ordinary Malaysians.

"Look at the distributors. Who is in control? The Indian (Malaysian) lady distributes it at 6am. If she doesn't do it, there would be no (Utusan).

"There are 500 to 600 7-11 outlets in the country. Vincent Tan owns it. He is a Chinese (Malaysian) tycoon."

Without help from others, Hata said Utusan would only have Umno and government agencies to turn to and that would be not enough for its survival.

"So it's not Utusan's fault. It is our fault. As long as we help (them) ... I believe Utusan will remain on our political landscape," he said.

'No real reform of PPPA'

Nottingham University Malaysia lecturer Zaharom Nain spoke on how the administration of premier Najib Abdul Razak has not brought about real reform to media laws.

NONEAlthough amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984 have done away with the need for annual printing and publishing licences for newspapers, the permit can still be withdrawn at the home minister's discretion.

"(Najib) said that they have loosened the PPPA. What happened was that, previously, there was opposition to having to renew (newspaper) licences annually. Najib now says that this is no longer needed," he said.

"But once a licence is given, it is kept. So what remains the same is the fact that the licence can be withdrawn. It is still the same thing."

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