

**See you in court, Mr Prime Minister**  
**MalaysiaKini.com**  
**Jun 5, 2014**

COMMENT The noise from the car workshop next to Malaysiakini's office distracted them and so my question remained suspended in mid-air. The trio appeared fascinated with the automated device that unscrewed the bolts on tyres.

There was a brief but excited chatter in Swahili.

The machine stopped and I repeated the question: "So what kind of problems do journalists face in your country?"

Reluctantly, the most loquacious of the three, tore his gaze away from the workshop and nonchalantly replied: "Abductions, beatings, splashing acid and pulling out fingernails."

The journalists from Tanzania were on a brief visit to Malaysiakini to learn the ropes about operating a news portal after the government had shut down their investigative magazine, Mwanahalisi.

The weekly magazine had incurred the wrath of the powers-that-be in 2008 with a report which exposed how the leader of a group of doctors demanding higher wages and better medical facilities was kidnapped and assaulted by the authorities.

The publisher, Saed Kubenea (right), one of the visiting journalists, was nearly blinded in one eye following a machete cum acid attack.

We listened to their tales with expressions of horror and amazement - horror for the abuses journalists have to face in Dar es Salaam and amazement for the courage they have to continue to do their job.

The human race is such that there would always be those who refuse to yield to pressure. To quote Abraham Lincoln, "Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty."

The encounter with the African journalists reminded me of how it felt to work in Malaysiakini when strongman Dr Mahathir Mohamad was in power, where the threat of police raids and incarceration constantly loomed over our heads.

But the political climate is different now.

Many journalists, who once did the bidding of political masters under the old regime, are now part of the new media, where portals mushroom with increasing pace backed by tycoons with deep pockets, championing press freedom and penning articles critical of the

establishment.

It is a laudable development that these individuals, some in their twilight years, have found their voices at long last.

It was during the watch of Mahathir's successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that the democratic space was prised open. After the latter was deposed, Najib Abdul Razak trotted in, armed with a slew of pledges and slogans to transform the country.

Credibility gap

However, it seems that the self-proclaimed reformer is backpedaling on his word. The filing of a law suit against Malaysiakini this week being a prime example.

And his chief apple polisher wasted little time in bringing out the shine - especially since rumour of a cabinet reshuffle is making the rounds - and praised the prime minister for his aggression.

The apple polisher is no stranger to the subject of aggression.

He is, after all, leader of a mob of potential arsonists and martial arts exponents who have demonstrated their bravado outside a number of DAP offices.

It is a shame that the prime minister had failed to show aggression in dealing with more pressing issues such as corruption and leakages as well as the peddlers of racial and religious hatred.

As the nation bled and continues to bleed due to these factors, Najib opted for elegant silence instead, preferring to indulge in selfies with the US president and panda bears.

But when a financial twist was suggested by Malaysiakini readers with regard to the political imbroglio in Terengganu, he sprung into action and ordered his legal team to haul the website to court.

Despite being invited to provide his version and to counter the allegations, the prime minister, who has never questioned the journalistic ethics of his party's mouthpiece, Utusan Malaysia, insisted on a legal battle instead.

Najib fails to understand that he, his party, his coalition, his administration and all his politicians and top civil servants suffer from a credibility gap.

So with perception being in the negative, it is almost certain that aspersions would be cast. This is unavoidable. He must learn to stomach them, no matter how unpalatable.

Since its inception, Malaysiakini has been a trailblazer, chalking up numerous awards both here and abroad. It has survived numerous trials and tribulations, threats and lawsuits.

So the premier's lawsuit looks set to add another feather to its cap, making Malaysiakini the first media organisation in the nation's history to put a prime minister in the witness stand.

As in the words of Malaysiakini's chief editor Fathi Aris Omar, "See you in court, Mr Prime Minister."

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Source: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/264752>