

**Najib ticked off for not exercising right of reply**  
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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's libel suit against Malaysiakini has not only made international headlines, but also invited brickbats from home and abroad.

The latest comes from Paris-based press freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF), which described the move by Najib as “disastrous” to freedom of information in Malaysia.

“We regret that the prime minister has opted for legal action instead of using his right of reply,” said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the RSF Asia-Pacific desk, in a statement.

“This libel action is disastrous for freedom of information in Malaysia because it means that any news outlet can be sued whenever it allow its readers to express their views. We urge the prime minister to reverse course and let people criticise him.”

This was echoed by reformist NGO Aliran, which said that the suit indicated the administration's inclination to muzzle instead of work with the media.

“While we abhor defamatory remarks in principle, Najib and Umno’s action is tantamount to instilling fear in other alternative media and their concerned readers.

“Malaysiakini, as a matter of principle, provides enough space for any aggrieved party to respond to any critical pieces or readers’ comments – a practice that is common in any thriving democracy.

“By not taking up Malaysiakini’s offer of a right of reply, Najib and company only reinforce the suspicion that the powers-that-be are inclined to muzzle the news portal, which is known for its relentless pursuit of truth without fear or favour,” the executive committee said.

Drop to suit

Aliran also urged Najib to consider the wider implications on democracy and to drop the legal suit.

Najib and Umno, through its executive secretary Abdul Rauf Yusoh, on June 3 served a writ of summons on Malaysiakini and its editors Steven Gan and Fathi Aris Omar.

The claimants say that the compilation of readers' comments in two ‘Yoursay’ articles published on May 14, namely ‘A case of the PM reaping what he sows’ and ‘How much will

Najib spend to keep Terengganu?', were defamatory.

"We intend to fight the suit vigorously," Gan said.

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