

Dealing with media, Najib vs Obama

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Last Thursday, Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak acted as though he was a journalism professor. He was lecturing media practitioners to be professional, responsible, bla bla bla bla and bla bla bla bla.

As it stands, journalists are tired of listening to the same old coming out of politicians' mouth.

Usually, politicians who like to remind the media of their responsibility do so to avoid having to answer big issues linked to them.

We know that Najib now is facing a huge problem. His deputy, Muhyiddin Yassin had even said that the 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) issue has the potential to explode in Umno's face.

How does Najib continue to be prime minister when his predecessor Dr Mahathir Mohamad belittles his abilities?

Politicians frequently, without shame, claim their reminders to the media are akin to advice from a father to a child.

They are not aware, or maybe they are hoping that the advice will blunt media's eagerness in unravelling abuse of power and corruption scandals

Like a snakehead fish eating its young

These reminders are usually infused with advice to hold fast to Malay customs to be polite and respectful to their elders.

What is worrying about authorities acting like a 'father figure' is the old Malay saying, 'haruan makan anak' (a snakehead fish eating its young), as noted by veteran journalist Fathi Aris Omar.

In a Facebook post, Fathi warned that it would be a major disaster if these authorities are not kept in check.

That is why media practitioners should not go to events such as last Thursday's media night, if only to be given a 'Journalism 101' lecture.

The media wants a prime minister who has the courage to challenge them to reveal the problems in his administration.

There is no use for Najib to talk non-stop like a retired professor about the responsibility of journalists, but at the same time keep mum on issues that really need airing.

After he finishing nagging about media's responsibility, Najib then turned into Santa Claus, distributing gifts to the journalists who attended the ceremony.

Higher pricetag for handbags

This is one of the perks of being a journalist in Malaysia: you stand to win a car in a lucky draw. Najib looked enthralled when dishing out prizes to the winners.

But this is small matter. Some observers say, the handbag paraded by Najib's wife in events here and there is more expensive than the price of the car.

We know this kind of event is an opportunity for Najib to mingle with journalists, and not the occasion to host a press conference.

US President Barack Obama recently hosted a similar event. But his speech at the gala was nothing like a lecturer addressing first year journalism students.

At a gala dinner late last month, Obama used the opportunity to raise a very important issue - that of climate change - which is ignored by some US politicians.

Obama's speech was delivered with a heavy dose of humour, accompanied by a comedian acting as his 'anger translator' so he could keep his calm.

But his goal is just that. Obama wants to be seen as serious in addressing climate change issues which have a significant impact on the country.

Obama made that speech at the White House Correspondents' Dinner late last month.

Najib, on the other hand gave his 'lecture' during the the Prime Minister Office's 2015 media night on Thursday, attended by Malaysia's leading journalists.

But as you can see, Obama's approach is not like Najib who adopted a paternalistic and condescending attitude towards journalists.