

Is Najib making U-turn on media freedom, too?'

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After reneging on his promise to repeal the colonial-era Sedition Act, is Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak now also going back on his promise to ensure internet freedom?

This was the question posed by Seputeh MP Teresa Kok, who pointed out that during the National Press Club awards on May 27 last year, Najib had promised to preserve the internet as a medium for free debate and open discussion.

She was referring to plans by newly -minted Communication and Multimedia Minister Salleh Said Keruak to regulate online news portals amid their reports following the 1MDB scandal.

"So why the move to attack democracy now? Has personal political survival become so important?"

"DAP will certainly fight against the government's proposal when it is tabled in Parliament," said Kok.

Salleh has denied that the plan had anything to do with the 1MDB scandal and said he expected the amendments to introduce the new regulations to be tabled in Parliament in October.

Salleh said among the model being considered is the one implemented in Singapore.

Under the Singapore model, news portals with more than 50,000 unique visitors a month must obtain an annual licence from the Media Development Authority (MDA).

They must deposit a SG\$50,000 bond with the MDA, which can be forfeited if they do not comply with rules set by the government.

Media feels the heat

At present, local online news portals operate relatively unhindered as they do not require a publishing licence from the Home Ministry and are therefore not subjected to the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 (PPPA).

Publications that do come under the PPPA have already felt the heat after The Edge Weekly and The Edge Financial Daily were suspended for three months, effective July 27, for their extensive reports on 1MDB.

The Southeast Asian Press Alliance (Seapa) in a statement today condemned the suspensions and called on the public to back a rally for media freedom tomorrow.

"We stand with our fellow Malaysian journalists in the walk for press freedom. We call on colleagues from around the region to stand with Malaysian journalists," the regional press group said.

The rally is being organised by a coalition of media groups comprising Gerakan Media Marah (Geramm), the Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), the Centre for Independent Journalism and the Foreign Correspondents Club of Malaysia.

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