

## **Najib vows to stop online 'insults, untruths'**

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**Radzi Razak**

Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak said that the government needs to regulate the internet to stop false news from spreading and to make sure no one falls victim to it.

"People who are ill-informed, on the other hand, will turn to half-truths and lies, and depend on unreliable sources who distort and sensationalise information. This is extremely dangerous.

"This is why my government intends to implement international standards to regulate the Internet – and I specifically say regulate, not restrict – so that none should have to suffer being criminally defamed, and so that the internet does not become an ungoverned space dominated by insults and untruths," he said at the Tunku Abdul Rahman lecture series in Kuala Lumpur last night.

Earlier this month, newly minted Multimedia and Communication Minister Salleh Said Keruak (photo) mooted that Malaysia would follow international standards in regulating the Internet.

On Aug 8, Salleh said in this regard, the revision of related laws would include a study on what was considered to be the norm in advanced countries that uphold freedom of speech.

Najib however defended his administration saying that they have yet to clamp down on government critics on social media.

Salleh has instructed the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) to meet Facebook, Google and Twitter "to seek their cooperation to stem the increasing tide of false information and rumours from spreading via their social media applications".

### **'None arrested for online expression'**

The prime minister said his government has always made sure the critics could express themselves freely, and proved it by referring to his former mentor Mahathir Mohamad, who has been using his blog as a launch pad for attacks on Najib.

"This was the greatest expansion of civil liberties in Malaysia's history. Yet some outsiders have attacked us for not taking care of the people's rights.

"And Tun Mahathir has said, in yet another ridiculously over the top statement, that 'democracy is dead' in Malaysia.

"If anyone doubts that Malaysians are at liberty to find fault with the government, they should spend a few moments looking online," he said.

"We are acutely aware of the criticisms levelled at the government – and we are listening.

"Unlike in many other countries in the developing world, however, no one will ever be arrested or prosecuted for the legitimate expression of their opinions," Najib said.

Critics of his administration has been vocal online, especially on social media.

Recent updates on Najib's official Facebook page has been flooded with thousands of comments, with many resorting to namecalling, and spamming with calls for him to step down.

A recent survey shows that netizens on Twitter overwhelmingly distrust Putrajaya over 1MDB and the RM2.6 billion in the prime minister's personal bank accounts.

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