

DPM, like journalists, ministers too must be held to ethics

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COMMENT According to reports, last night at the Malaysian Press Night 2016, Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi told traditional media journalists to hold tight to journalism ethics in facing competition from the digital media.

He reportedly said that freedom enjoyed by digital media journalists whom he claimed are unrestricted by the ethical standards of the profession, is apparently threatening to bury [journalism ethics](#) upheld by the traditional media practitioners.

While there are many arguments that can be made on what journalism ethics mean and entails, we can perhaps point out to the good minister that those who hold public office too should hold tight to democratic ethics, despite facing challenges and competition from the opposition.

They should do well to remember that elected seats of power are not inherited just because of what bloodline runs in one's veins or what their party did for Merdeka.

The post of elected government is not hereditary nor it is lifelong property, but one that by democratic principles should be subject to electoral review, as is the practice in Malaysia, every five years.

One does not grip with white knuckles the seats that one is elected into, for one can be and should be just as easily elected out of them by the people's choice. Or in some cases, perhaps it is high time that some should be voted out.

While democratic elected posts are not supposed to be hereditary nor one party's property, some are surely acting as it is, or perhaps telling all that it should be.

And just as Zahid argued that journalists must refrain from making assumptions unrelated to facts but on "imagination and perceptions", so should ministers refrain from making statements and announcing policy decisions that seemed not to be based on facts, but their imagination and perception.

Gov't's power privilege from rakyat

Something that seems to occur more and more these days - alleged media spin notwithstanding - as statements and announcements which can threaten to submerge the actual intellectual capacity of ministers and officials seem to flood us these days.

More than just being subject of ridicule, problematic comments from ministers may also pose the danger of overstepping democratic bounds and outstripping their borrowed authority.

For one, all that is listed as the rakyat's rights are not to be labeled privileges granted to by the government. Instead, it is the duty of the powers that be to secure, preserve and guarantee such rights as the freedom of expression and travel.

The power of a democratic government stems from the people, and so does its authority, so there is no such thing as power belonging to the government, but that which is temporarily given for the elected party to oversee and implement policies as the rakyat wishes it, and not as they see fit.

And whatever power the government has to restrict the rakyat's rights are enumerated in laws which must be followed to the letter, not used arbitrarily and at the whims and fancies by the powers that be.

Although the government's power is not supposed to be arbitrary and absolute, and ministers are perhaps not as intellectually challenged as some may claim, current practices however seem to unfortunately suggest otherwise.

Zahid also reportedly noted that while competition from digital media saw traditional print and electronic media opting for digitalisation as an alternative platform to expand their reach and audience, it did not mean that journalists from the print and electronic media could set aside journalism ethics.

In the same vein, just because the ruling party is afraid of losing their power and faced with increasing criticism from the rakyat, it does not mean that they should chuck aside democratic principles and start enforcing restrictive laws or even extra-legal restrictions on critics.