

**Question on moral policing ties Zaid up
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What are the steps taken by Pakatan to balance the religious views of those who are keen to impose moral policing?

That was one of the tough questions former law minister and PKR supreme council member Zaid Ibrahim was confronted with at the Hard Talk on Human Rights session at the 15th Malaysian Law Conference at KLCC today.

NONEIt came from the moderator - former Bar Council chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan.

Zaid (left) replied that he wished that Pakatan component party PAS had not and should not have issued bans on concerts and impose other forms of moral policing.

"Power is about leveraging. When you have federal power, only then can you leverage," he said, implying that Pakatan could only achieve this if they had taken over the government.

However, that answer brought a riposte from director and musawah board member of Sisters in Islam Zainah Anwar. "It sounds like an excuse that Pakatan is not doing what they should," she chided him.

"These are all difficult issues. It's the reality, not an excuse. Effective management of power (is possible) only if we have strong federal power," Zaid countered, adding that it all came down to leadership.

Despite obstacles, the press presses on

Speaking to an audience of about 200 people, Ambiga then brought up the issue of press freedom, or rather the lack of it.

"When the Prime Minister (Najib Abdul Razak) took over last year, the ban on Suara Keadilan was lifted but one year later, the opposition mouthpiece is under attack.

"What had caused this newspaper to face the chop by the government?" she said, directing the question to special and investigating reporting editor of The Sun, R Nadeswaran.

His reply was that despite the perception that the government is opposed to media freedom, the press have managed to expose many wrongdoings.

"But we are not arrested for this. This is something positive," he said, adding that the government is only targeting reports that cannot be substantiated.

NONEAmbiga (right) then grilled Nadeswaran on his opinion whether the requirement of licensing for print media is justified.

"I do not agree with the licensing at all," he said after the veteran lawyer pressed for an answer.

Zaid then went on to point out, "Who owns the newspaper that Nadeswaran writes for?"

Nades hit back and claimed that the owner of The Sun had never interfered in their work as

yet.

There has been no directives 'per se' given by the government to order a blackout on certain issues, Nades said when asked by Ambiga.

However, Nades was quick to point out that there might have been meetings between the government and the editor-in-chief that he might not be aware of.

Low marks on human rights

When asked to rank the human rights condition in Malaysia, Zaid gave the country a two (out of 10) because, he said, although we live in a democracy, the elections were not fair, the media was not free and the people live in fear.

"The prime minister is supposed to officially open this event but (he is not here and this means) he is afraid. We want human rights because we do not want to live in fear," Zaid added.

Other speakers in the panel were former MCA president Ong Tee Keat and Suhakam commissioner James Nayagam.

This three-day event is an annual affair where the Malaysian legal fraternity discuss core legal issues.

The list of notable speakers includes former justice of the high court of Australia Michael Kirby, Chief Justice Zaki Azmi, opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, group chief executive of CIMB Group Nazir Razak and MACC chief commissioner Abu Kassim Mohamed.

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