

Ministry must stop ignoring recommendations
Malaysiakini.com
April 23, 2007
Sonia Randhawa

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) is deeply concerned that the Internal Security Ministry is adamant about maintaining laws which curtail media freedom in the country, which is contrary to both government policy and to the comments made by international and local observers.

On April 18, Bernama reported that Deputy Internal Security Minister Fu Ah Kiow had said in Parliament that the Printing Presses and Publication Act 1984 (PPPA), the Internal Security Act 1960 and the Sedition Act 1948 would not be amended as they are important in maintaining national harmony and security.

The Internal Security Ministry's stand violates the recommendations by the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam), which in 2003 found that provisions of those laws and those of the Official Secrets Act 1972 should be repealed. The ministry is also ignoring international standards for press freedom.

Similar recommendations to amend these laws were made by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Abid Hussain, who visited the country in 1998.

The ministry is also ignoring a suggestion made by member of parliament Wong Nai Chee to set up a parliamentary select committee to review issues of media freedom.

The PPPA, among others, gives absolute power to the Internal Security Minister to grant, revoke and suspend the annual publication permits of newspapers and magazines without judicial review. The Sedition Act 1948 is a broadly worded act that, if strictly applied, would qualify all expression as seditious. The ISA is a controversial act which allows detention without trial for two years, this duration being renewable indefinitely.

CIJ notes regretfully that the deputy minister's statement ignores the people's support for transparency and openness as reflected in the 2004 general election, and shows blatant indifference to their right to freedom of expression and opinion, recognised internationally as well as being reflected nationally in the Federal Constitution.

The statement also contradicts government policy, such as the recently unveiled 'Lifelong National Mission' - which emphasises 'creating an excellent pool of human capital' - as these moves discourage independent thinking.

CIJ urges the government to be more receptive to the voices of the people by opening up the media and lifting the legislation control. A parliamentary select committee on communication rights is a much-needed first step.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/66313>