

Raja Petra free but likely to remain in exile
Malaysiakini.com
November 01, 2010

Top blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin, who fled Malaysia after being held under security laws in 2008, is free to return after a detention order lapsed, his lawyer said today.

However the founder of the popular Malaysia Today website, which has outraged top leaders with its stream of critical stories, is unlikely to leave his self-imposed exile in Britain for fear of fresh charges, he said.

"This order has lapsed but it does not stop the authorities from seeking my client's detention on other grounds should he return," said lawyer Jadadish Chandra.

NONE"Raja Petra is in the UK at the moment and he is unlikely to return to Malaysia anytime soon," he told AFP.

Raja Petra (right) was detained in September 2008 and held for 56 days under the Internal Security Act, which allows for indefinite detention without trial.

He was accused of writing articles that allegedly insulted Islam. But the blogger, himself a member of Malaysia's majority Muslim community, is best known for his political articles.

Charges could be revived

He was freed by the High Court in November 2008 after it ruled the government had acted outside its powers by ordering the two-year detention, but his future was cast into doubt when the decision was appealed.

"The order has been struck off by the court because the order was valid for only two years so now it has expired," Chandra said. "There was no new order issued."

Raja Petra had also been charged with sedition and defamation after linking Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and his wife to the sensational 2006 murder of a Mongolian woman who was the lover of one of the premier's aides.

Those charges have been "discontinued" but could be revived, his lawyer said.

Raja Petra's detention caused a major stir because unlike the mainstream press, the web and online media in Malaysia have remained relatively free, despite occasional raids, bans and government criticism.

Major newspapers and broadcasters are closely linked with the ruling coalition, so the Internet has become a lively forum for dissent and debate.

The government in 1996 pledged to allow uncensored online content as part of a campaign to promote its information technology sector.

- AFP

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