

No quick end in sight for ISA, PPPA
Malaysiakini.com
Apr 30, 2008

Newly-appointed Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar quashed any hopes of a quick end to restrictive media laws when he told RTM1's MCPX 'Bersemuka Bersama Media' programme that the Printing Presses and Publications Act was still valid.

The former foreign minister also extinguished any hopes for quick changes to the Internal Security Act, arguing that "the preventive law was more effective in pre-empting unrest in the country than normal measures".

syed hamid albar 200807 During the hour-long programme, which was broadcasted live last night, Syed Hamid said that in a multi-racial and multi-religious country, such laws were necessary to ensure peace and harmony.

"We are not against people's freedoms but at the same time, we need the ISA to stop people who incite others before any damage is done," he said.

"Freedom is not just about rights but also about responsibilities too. And as the government, we've to ensure there is balance in the two matters.

"During Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's administration, a lot of leeway is given to people, be it media, rallies or public forums, but many still perceive that it is not enough."

Room for improvement

While he admitted there was still room to improve the system, the minister stressed that the ISA is still necessary to ensure that peace and harmony remains in the country.

Asked why ISA detainees were not brought to court, Syed Hamid said this was done to protect the government's intelligence gathering units and secrets.

It was also pointed out to the minister that some detainees have been held for as long as six years without trial.

"Besides protecting certain information the government has acquired, the objective of ISA is to re-habilitate people and not treat them as criminals. Once they are no longer deemed dangerous, we release them.

"And because this is not under the Penal Code, they go back to society without any criminal records," Syed Hamid explained.

Asked if the re-emergence of such laws in United Kingdom and the United States after the Sept 11 attacks has encouraged the government to keep the ISA, Syed Hamid answered, "There will be a time for that (to dismantle the ISA) but not now".

He also dismissed suggestions that the government uses the ISA as a tool to clamp down on its political rivals as "nonsensical".

"If you look at the recent elections, there was a lot of freedom given everywhere. Furthermore, the ministry does not issue instructions for the use of ISA, it is the police who do that," said Syed Hamid.

Sufficient freedom

On media freedom, he said that there was sufficient freedom in the country with some 31 newspaper licences issued.

"Furthermore, if you look at the recent elections, dissemination of news is no longer restricted to traditional avenues like newspapers and television. Information sharing is now very rampant on blogs and alternative news websites such as Malaysiakini.

"As such, we don't see any restrictions placed on the media in Malaysia," said Syed Hamid.

Asked whether the government has from time to time instructed mainstream news editors to not publish certain news, he told the panelists to look to the future and not the past.

"While, yes, the government has sometimes told the mainstream media not to highlight crimes or even the haze issues, but this is something of the past.

"And when we did that, it was done with the intention of not frightening tourists," he added.

The weekly programme is hosted by RTM with panelists from other media organisations.

Besides its host Sabarudin Ahmad Sabri, yesterday's interview saw the participation of The Sun's political editor Zainon Ahmad and Malaysiakini editor K Kabilan.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news//82149>