

**Same media message sent to Pak Lah
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In conjunction with World Press Freedom Day, several party leaders have called on the government to relax laws media laws to ensure greater amount of journalistic freedom.
MCPX

Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi however did not give any indication of this during his speech at the Malaysian Press Institute awards night yesterday.

Instead, he urged journalist, and even bloggers, to practise journalism professionally and responsibly.

koh tsu koon wawasan university 220906 talkBoth Gerakan acting president Dr Koh Tsu Koon and MCA president Ong Ka Ting had issued statements noting the impact of the Internet and the need for media law reforms.

Koh said Gerakan supported Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar's suggestion that the practice regulating newspapers through an annual printing permit application process be relooked.

He said that should the practice be scrapped, it would be the first step in granting the press more freedom.

"People are increasingly turning to e-media as an alternative channel for information and views. If the printed media is not allowed greater freedom to match the e-media, it will lose its credibility and readership," said Koh.

Existing laws sufficient

Similarly, Ong said that there was no permit needed to start a blog or a website and questioned the need for a printing permit in Malaysia.

"There are enough laws governing the print media. Waiving the annual renewal will certainly show the government's commitment to the press in this country," said Ong.

wan azizah interview 270308 03On the opposition front, PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Ismail and DAP veteran Lim Kit Siang had both cited Malaysia's steady slide in the press freedom ranking as a cause for concern.

Wan Azizah said the lack of press freedom in the country had given rise to thousands of 'cyber activists' who managed to influence the general election result.

"Even the PM had admitted that cyber activists are a force to be reckoned with but unfortunately, he did not learn from his mistakes," she said in a statement today.

She also questioned police move to haul up celebrated blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin for questioning on the eve of World Press Freedom Day.

Not too late

Meanwhile, Lim said the prime minister should embrace press freedom to complement his efforts to reform the judiciary and clamping down on corruption.

lim kit siang dap pc 130208 stressed "When Abdullah first became home minister eight years ago, he was presented with a memorandum by Malaysian journalists calling for press freedom reform. He had at that time promised to study the memorandum but nothing has come out of it so far.

"The March 8 political tsunami should be a salutary lesson to the PM that it is time he embrace press freedom reform although it is eight years late," said Lim.

In related development, the National Union of Journalist (NUJ) has called on the government to replace the Official Secrets Act (OSA) with a law that allows freedom of information.

"The OSA should be replaced. It has been the main obstacle for media access to government information. The credibility and sincerity of the government can only be proven if there is easy access to information for the media and public.

"With the Information Act in place, NUJ feels the call for a more transparent and accountable administration will be realised," said NUJ president Norila Md Daud.

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