

Online daily barred from Najib's cabinet event
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A Chinese online daily was today barred from covering Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's announcement of the new cabinet line-up in Putrajaya this afternoon.

The reporter and a photographer from Merdeka Review were told of the matter by Prime Minister's Office security guards when trying to obtain security passes, half an hour before the press conference began at 3pm.

According to the reporter, she contacted one of Najib's aides who confirmed the matter, adding that the decision was made by the Prime Minister's Office.

Commenting on the ban, Merdeka Review editor-in-chief Chang Teck Teng said he would submit a letter to the Prime Minister's Office tomorrow to protest the decision.

He said barring his reporters from covering the event was unreasonable in view of Najib's recent speech on press freedom.

"As the new prime minister, he cannot cakap tak serupa bikin (go against his word). He must respect press freedom and do what he has promised. He cannot have a ban without providing any reasons," he said.

'Report without fear'

Chang was referring to Najib's speech to the Malaysian Press Institute on April 6 where the newly appointed premier called on the press to perform their duties "without fear of consequence".

Najib added that he would encourage a new national debate that would promote transparency and accountability.

"I firmly believe that there is a vital place in that dialogue for a vibrant, free and informed media..."

"If we are truly to build a democracy that is responsive to the needs of all the people, we need a media - both old and new - that is empowered to responsibly report what they see, without fear of consequence," he added.

In a similar vein, Najib's cabinet announcement speech today declared that the era of a "government knows best" attitude are over and the government would be more responsive to public demands.

Other than reporters from Merdeka Review, five newsmen who arrived after the 2.50pm cut-off time, were also barred from entering the Prime Minister's Department building.