

Kit Siang reminds MCMC of public perception
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KUALA LUMPUR - Lim Kit Siang joined Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak in expressing concern about the rise of racial and religious slurs on the Internet, but urged industry regulator MCMC to maintain the highest standards of professionalism when helping the government to curb the abuse.

"The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission can be assured of public support for any strict action against abuses of the Internet as putting up content with racial and religious slurs which could spark off tension in our country," the DAP adviser said in a statement.

"The MCMC must, however, jealously protect its credibility and legitimacy by never losing public confidence in its independence, integrity and professionalism as a key institution to protect the national interests and not to be the tool of any sectional or partisan political interests or even the government-of-the-day."

Indeed there are fears of an impending crackdown on cyberspace following several warnings from Najib, his deputy Muhyiddin Yassin, Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein and Information minister Rais Yatim in the past few weeks.

The concerns are based on the expectations that the BN-led federal government will try to shore up its own political power ahead of general elections that must be held latest by 2013, according to Malaysia Chronicle.

Most of Malaysia's urban population are ardent 'netizens' and make no bones about how they feel about the country's leadership on the Net. As such, the early groundwork to neutralise the dissemination of any information that is not pro-BN on the Internet and to deny the political opposition led by Anwar Ibrahim of its main channel of communication.

Last week, in an early blitz that is expected to intensify soon, a blogger Irwan Abdul Rahman was charged for posting an article that satirised energy firm Tenaga Nasional Bhd. Irwan works for an Umno-linked news paper Malay Mail, but he still got into trouble for the bigwigs at the government-controlled utility.

Irwan's prosecution underscores Malaysia's increasingly authoritarian regime as Najib's coalition pulls out all stops to maintain its 53-year monopoly on power and keep at bay Anwar's Pakatan Rakyat.

"Recently, MCMC prosecuted a blogger for a satirical post although the posting clearly indicated that it was only a work of fiction. But the photo is worse, it is a crime," DAP information chief Tony Pua told reporters.

Pua was referring to a doctored photo of Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan slaughtering a cow as part of a Muslim ritual. The picture was posted on several Umno-linked blogs to incite unhappiness amongst the Malays for Guan Eng. Pua lambasted the MCMC for inconsistency in not tackling the Guan Eng photo with the same alacrity as with the Irwan case.

"The rise and frequency of instances of racial and religious slurs in the public domain particularly on the social media and the Internet must be a matter of grave concern to all Malaysians," said Kit Siang.

"All right-thinking Malaysians regardless of political affiliation should join hands to call and work for a return of civility, reason and rationality in public discourse and an end to any form of racial or religious slurs particularly on the social media and Internet."

On Saturday, Najib reiterated his instruction to the MCMC to monitor the Internet and take action against those who put up content with racial and religious slurs could spark off tension.

"I hope the commission will take strict action against these culprits as they are creating mischief and this we cannot tolerate," Najib told reporters during a visit to his hometown in Pekan.

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