

Accept blogging as new media

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NUJ calls on Government to be more open to Internet reporting

KUALA LUMPUR: The National Union of Journalists Malaysia has urged the Government to acknowledge the existence of Internet citizen reporting and blogging as a new media for disseminating information.

NUJ president Norila Mohd Daud said this online phenomenon had made a great impact on the country as an alternative information source on current issues affecting the public.

"The usage of Internet and the concept of the uncensored 'borderless world' have made information more easily accessible to anyone. As such, any abuses by public officials can be immediately exposed on the Internet," she said in a statement issued in conjunction with World Press Freedom Day yesterday.

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NORILA MOHD DAUD

Norila said it was also in line with the Government's mission to ensure greater accountability and transparency, as well as improving its delivery system.

At the same time, she said the growth of this new media channel had changed the current journalism landscape.

"In view of this latest development, NUI feels that the Government should accord greater freedom to the local media by amending restrictive laws such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act, and Official Secrets Act (OSA)," she said.

Meanwhile, three Members of Parliament claimed press freedom was still lacking in Malaysia and the overlapping of laws controlling the media made it difficult for it to "breathe".

Barisan Nasional's Kota Melaka MP Wong Nai Chee, Tumpat MP Datuk Kamaruddin Jaafar (PAS) and Kepong MP Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP)

all agreed that it was imperative to protect the independence of local journalists.

During a forum at a World Press Freedom Day event, themed *Press Freedom, Safety of Journalists, and Impunity* yesterday, Wong said press freedom was not given priority nor was it at the forefront of the country's political agenda.

"Politicians fear it (raising press freedom issues) will be self-inflicting and bring about political damage," he said yesterday at the event organised by Asian Institute for Development Communication (Aidcom).

He said the press would be freer when laws did not overlap, and cited the Printing Presses and Publications Act, which required the media to apply for a permit to print newspa-

pers and was revocable at any time, as an example.

However, Wong said some form of regulation was necessary due to the intertwining of race, culture and religion in the country but stressed that access to information should be easily available to ensure news of public interest was reported.

Dr Tan, who is the DAP deputy chairman, suggested setting up a special Parliamentary Select Committee on the media to determine the country's state of press freedom.

Kamaruddin, who is PAS secretary-general, said, "Preserving the dignity of the profession and journalists is worth fighting for, although some practitioners do not wish to risk their position for fear of losing their licence," he added.