

Dr M: Rethink absolute freedom on Net
Malaysian Insider
June 3, 2012

KUALA LUMPUR, June 3 — Putrajaya should rethink absolute freedom on the Internet, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said, reversing his previous guarantee that Malaysia would never censor online content.

The former prime minister, an avid blogger, told The New Sunday Times in an interview published today that countries should now enforce some form of regulatory control to block “filth” and punish those who corrupt the minds of Internet users.

“When I said there should be no censorship of the Internet, I really did not realise the power of the Internet, the power to undermine moral values, the power to create problems and agitate people.

“Now it is so porous that we cannot prevent all this filth from coming into our country,” he was reported saying in the interview at Malaysia’s 26th Asia-Pacific Roundtable held at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies last week.

Dr Mahathir, who was prime minister for 22 years until 2003, had promised that Malaysia would never censor the Internet in any way as part of a pledge draw investors to develop the Multimedia Super Corridor.

He had repeated this stand last at the Third Annual Malaysian Student Leaders Summit in August last year, although he then suggested disciplinary action on some aspects of Net abuse.

“For example, there is too much violence coming through on the Internet.

“That, I think, we have a right to ban, but as far as political thinking, if you are not instigating violence and things like that, I think the Internet should not be censored in any way,” Bernama had then reported him as saying.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak voiced similar sentiments last year and vowed his administration would not resort to Internet censorship but will instead engage further with Malaysians when acknowledging that people now use social networking sites to express outrage.

“Malaysians have to thank Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad for this.

“When he was the prime minister, and Malaysia was developing our Multimedia Super Corridor, Tun made the promise to the world that Malaysia would never censor the Internet.

“My government is fully committed to that wisdom — we intend to keep his word,” Najib told the first Malaysian-Asean Regional Bloggers Conference here on April 24 last year.

Social media, primarily Facebook and Twitter, has been partly credited with organising the Egyptian uprising that eventually led to the resignation of strongman Hosni Mubarak as president.

The Egyptian government had briefly banned Twitter, a micro-blogging site, as a result of

massive protests arranged via social networking sites.

There have been two previous attempts by the government to implement filters similar to China's "Green Dam" here. Both were met with vociferous protests by Internet users that forced the government to backtrack on the efforts.

Growing Internet access and the ability of the opposition to disseminate information online has been cited as one of the factors for Barisan Nasional's worst electoral effort in Election 2008.

Since then, the ruling coalition has been working to narrow the gap, including training "cyber troopers" and providing social media training to its members.

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/dr-m-rethink-absolute-freedom-on-net/>