

**Lawyer Supports Licensing Of News Websites**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 30 (Bernama) -- Malaysia should emulate Singapore in implementing regulations pertaining to the imposition of licences on news websites nationwide to monitor those who use the internet to instigate and threaten peace.

Advocate and solicitor Datuk Salehuddin Saidin said Article 10 of the Federal Constitution gave freedom of expression to the people.

"But keep in mind, these rights are also generated conditionally, namely independence should not lead to defamation, incitement, questioning the sultans' privileges and so forth.

"To me, it is better if it (unbridled freedom) is controlled and checked before communal harmony is continually disturbed.

"The licence will surely make the owners of the news websites more restrained with the articles they use," he said when contacted by Bernama here Thursday.

He said this when commenting on Singapore's move to enforce regulations from Saturday, whereby websites with 50,000 visitors from Singapore each month and producing at least one local article a week, must obtain an annual licence from the Media Development Board (MDA) of that country.

An international news agency quoted an MDA statement which required the licensed websites to withdraw sensitive materials which could threaten harmony, within 24 hours of being informed by the authorities.

Licensed websites must also provide S\$50,000 as security bond.

Salehuddin, who supported Singapore's action, said the people in this country had long been "given face, and instigation through dissemination of articles, should be seen as a serious phenomenon as it increasingly disturbed the continuity of the communities".

He also suggested that the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (SKMM) take action by licensing news portals in the country to ensure a more transparent monitoring.

He said by having these regulations, SKMM could compile information on the owners of news portals and on writers and other individuals involved with the portals.

In this manner, it would facilitate action on irresponsible parties, especially news portals which sought to threaten national unity and public peace, he said.

Salehuddin also proposed that the government impose a suitable bond of between RM10,000 and RM50,000, depending on current suitability as a collateral on the owners of websites to ensure they complied with stipulated regulations.

Another law practitioner, Wan Azmir Wan Majid said stringent enforcement of the law was crucial, seeing that mere imposition of a licence would not deter certain quarters from issuing statements which harboured on instigation.

"The issue is not whether news portals have a licence or not, but how far the government uses the law to check instigation.

"If various licences are given to any quarters, but implementation is weak, assuredly there will be no changes, and irresponsible parties will use it to continue issuing articles which can trigger racial chaos," he noted.

In this regard, he said, the government must be more concerned about implementing the law so that the provocation being raised daily would not continue to be a thorn in the flesh that divided the communities in the country.

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