

**Low should do the right thing and reverse Najib's directive, says Pua**  
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**BY LEE SHI-IAN**

As the minister responsible for transparency and accountability, Datuk Paul Low should make a firm stand on the prime minister's directive to government departments and government-linked companies to advertise more in Utusan Malaysia, said DAP's Tony Pua today.

DAP national publicity secretary Pua said Low's own conscience should be clear that the directive issued by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak was a major conflict of interest and a waste of the taxpayers' funds.

"Low should stop becoming a window-dressing for Najib's administration and stop giving his feedback 'internally'. If he is unable to reverse such a clear cut abuse of power, how does he expect to make the government more transparent and accountable?" Pua questioned.

"Unless Low is happy that he is being made used of by the prime minister, he should just pack his bags because it has been made clear over the past few days that it is Umno's interests above everything else," Pua said.

On Saturday, Low was asked by a news portal whether it was all right for Najib to ask GLCs and government departments to advertise more in Utusan Malaysia. Low replied Najib was the premier and he sets the priorities.

"It's a transparent decision but it's favouring some... so not all can agree with his decision," Low was quoted by Malaysiakini as saying. He added that he would only remind the GLCs to carry out their fiduciary duties properly and that he will give his feedback "internally".

As Low was the person in charge of transparency and good governance, Pua said he cannot be wishy-washy about the subject and make garbled and baffling statements. Low had also declined to reveal what advice he would give Najib on the matter.

"Low should do everything in his power to ensure that the prime minister retracts his misguided directive," said Pua.

"Going by Low's comments, is he telling the GLCs to ignore Najib's directive and carry out their fiduciary duties only by spending money which brings real and actual returns and value to the company? What about the ministries and government departments which fall under Najib's jurisdiction, should they follow or defy his order?"

Pua said Malaysians should not be surprised if government officers fall over themselves to follow Najib's orders and concoct different sorts of advertisements with Utusan Malaysia to demonstrate their undying and unflinching loyalty to the prime minister.

On Friday, Najib said he realised that newspaper companies could not rely solely on circulation to stay in business. He said advertising was crucial to keep the 75-year-old Utusan Malaysia afloat and called on government agencies, GLCs and private companies, especially those owned by Bumiputeras, to advertise in the Bahasa Malaysia daily.

Najib said Utusan had done well in upholding the Malay agenda and Malay nationalism.

Utusan had remained firm and had never backed down from defending the Malay race, besides playing a role in opening up the minds of the public to current issues.

However, the downside is that Utusan's reporting has landed the daily into legal troubles on numerous occasions.

Pakatan Rakyat leaders who have sued Utusan for defamation and won include opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, Seputeh MP Teresa Kok and former Perak menteri besar Datuk Seri Mohamad Nizar Jamaluddin.

In January, Anwar won a suit against Utusan after the High Court ruled in his favour and found that Utusan Malaysia had defamed him in two articles. The court found that the articles were lacking in responsible journalism and Utusan Malaysia took a high risk in publishing them on the front page.

In February, the Court of Appeal upheld a High Court decision ordering the Umno-controlled daily to pay RM200,000 to Lim over a defamatory article.

Utusan Malaysia columnist Datuk Chamil Wariya and the newspaper made an open apology in High Court in June. It was part of a settlement in a defamation suit against them filed by Kok against them. The newspaper was also ordered to pay costs of RM50,000 and to publish an apology in the daily after Kok had filed a RM30 million defamation suit against them in December 2008.

In July, the Kuala Lumpur High Court awarded Mohammad Nizar RM250,000 as damages in his suit against Utusan Malaysia over the WWW1 car registration number issue. - September 16, 2013.

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