

Khalid's 'Twitter policing' gets home minister okay
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By Eileen Ng

The Twitter habits of Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Tan Sri Khalid Abu Bakar got an endorsement from the home minister, who said today using the social media platform to make announcements did not break any laws.

Instead, it was aimed at keeping the public informed on the police's actions and was not politically motivated or out to scare anyone, Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said.

Police have always acted professionally, maintained law and public order, and set out to detect and eradicate crime without fear or favour, he said today.

"As such, PDRM uses Twitter to inform the public on actions taken on matters which can cause worry among the public, and the successes achieved by PDRM," he said, using the Malay acronym for the Royal Malaysian Police Force.

"Such announcements do not contravene current laws and regulations and it is quick and easy to spread to the public," Ahmad Zahid told Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Gelang Patah) in a written reply.

The minister said police took a serious view of those who used the micro-blogging site to influence and incite people, and called this a threat to national security.

Last month, Khalid said it was "appalling" that critics were firing the police for using Twitter.

"To accuse the Malaysian police of using Twitter to intimidate critics is most inappropriate and to charge that we use the medium as an extension of the arm of archaic and draconian laws is uncalled for," he had said in a statement.

Critics, including opposition politicians and lawyers, have accused Khalid of using his Twitter account to intimidate dissenting voices by issuing warnings "on a whim" about what and who could or could not be published.

Khalid's use of Twitter to warn Putrajaya's critics had also attracted the attention of US daily The New York Times, which accused Putrajaya of using draconian and archaic laws to sideline and intimidate its critics for decades.

It added that the latest cases came with a modern twist with Khalid using his Twitter account to issue warnings and to order his subordinates to track and investigate dissenters.

Lawyers for Liberty executive director Eric Paulsen had previously expressed concerns with Khalid's self-appointed role as the "Twitter police".

He added that it was shocking the "Twitter policing" was often done at the behest of pro-Umno cybertroopers and trolls, who would identify tweets that were critical of the government and tag the IGP, urging him to take action.

"Needless to say, it is unbecoming for the IGP to be seemingly taking instructions from pro-Umno cybertroopers and trolls when he should be neutral when dealing with them whose work is obviously politically motivated and done in bad faith," Paulsen said.

In January, Paulsen was arrested by the police for allegedly accusing the Department of Islamic Development (Jakim) on Twitter of spreading extremism through Friday sermons.

Paulsen tweeted on January 9: "Jakim is promoting extremism every Friday. Govt needs to address that if serious about extremism in Malaysia."

Khalid, who uses the handle @KBAB51, warned of action against the activist. Paulsen was later picked up and charged last Thursday with sedition.

Khalid also announced that several Pakatan Rakyat leaders and others who criticised the government and judiciary over Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's conviction would be investigated for sedition.

Among them are PKR secretary-general Rafizi Ramli and DAP's Taiping MP Nga Kor Ming. – March 11, 2015.

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