

Press is more free now than under Dr M, says senior media executive
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By Kc Nazari

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has displayed more openness towards media freedom compared with Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, a top executive of a Bahasa Malaysia daily said at a forum on press freedom today.

Sinar Harian editorial executive adviser Datuk Abdul Jalil Ali said he had experienced Dr Mahathir's hand against the press, when the newspaper "Eksklusif" which he ran during the latter's administration was shut down.

"Najib is fairly open and fair when it comes to media freedom. In fact, Tun M was more stringent.

"In fact, one of my newspapers called 'Eksklusif' was banned. They didn't actually ban it, they only said its permit was not renewed.

"We had to close shop and more than 50 workers were without jobs," Jalil said at the forum "Journalism Now" held in Kuala Lumpur, in conjunction with World Press Freedom Day.

Jalil added that under Najib's administration, he had only been called once to meet the prime minister and the home minister at the time, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein.

The meeting was over a letter "Surat dari penjara" (A letter from prison) written by opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim that Sinar Harian had published.

"The mentality of some of the ministers is as if they think the media belongs to their party," Jalil said.

He said he was asked to step down from his position in Sinar Harian or risk being sacked, but nothing happened in the end because the newspaper is not owned by Umno. But he would not disclose who it was that had threatened him over his job.

"Even though the government is seen as suppressing the media here, in my case, it's still OK. People say this country has no media freedom, but in Sinar Harian's experience, I am happy with the situation now."

Another editor, Malaysiakini editor-in-chief Steven Gan said Putrajaya was following Singapore's example in using the law to oppress the media.

"Legal action is being used as yet another tool against the media."

Malaysiakini is current battling a defamation suit filed by Najib in his private capacity over comments made by readers carried in the news portal.

The case will go to trial in June. – May 12, 2015.

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