

New minister wants to clamp down on 'false news', 'fake documents' on the Web
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The law that regulates Internet content in Malaysia will be amended to protect citizens from "slander" and "character assassination", said newly-minted Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Salleh Said Keruak.

The move comes as Putrajaya struggles to respond to allegations published on the internet over debt-ridden 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), which has seen it trying to shutter whistle-blower website Sarawak Report.

The amendments to the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA) would also question the Najib administration's repeated pledges not to censor the Internet and allow freedom of speech.

"We (will) review the CMA so that we can strike a balance between not stifling free speech and continuing with freedom of information while at the same time protecting Malaysians from criminal acts that appear to have become the trend of late," Salleh wrote in a blog posting today.

"While Malaysia will uphold freedom of speech and the right to information, we must also protect Malaysians from libel and slander, plus character assassination.

"In no country in the world does freedom of speech include the freedom to lie and slander," Salleh wrote.

The Malaysian Multimedia and Communication Corporation (MCMC), which comes under the ministry, has blocked access to Sarawak Report claiming that it is fabricating proof of 1MDB's financial scandals.

The London-based website has been active in putting up documents it claims show how 1MDB-related funds have been funnelled into the personal bank accounts of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Putrajaya has claimed that many of Sarawak Report's exposes are fake, an allegation which the website denies.

Allegations of a money trail into Najib's accounts were also published early last month by The Wall Street Journal (WSJ).

"Malaysians seem to have the impression that the Internet and social media is a lawless domain where anything goes and where there are no rules to follow.

"That is actually not so," wrote Salleh, explaining why the CMA needs to be reviewed.

Salleh said when the government first enacted the CMA in 1998 it did not foresee the

popularity of the Internet and the widespread use of social media would be.

He said the popular use of the Internet has also given rise to crimes such as fraud, data theft, identity theft, and fabrication of news and documents.

“National security and public order are also of concern and which can be jeopardised if there were no proper controls over what people do and say.” – August 2, 2015.

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