

**Media clampdown won't help Najib, say pressure groups**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**August 5, 2015**  
**By Jennifer Gomez**

Allegations of media spinning news should be dealt with through lawsuits, not by clamping down on journalists or the company's operations, pressure groups said.

They added that threats by top leaders of the country to take action against the media for wrong reporting would only backfire.

The Centre to Combat Corruption and Cronyism (C4) and Gerakan Media Marah (Geramm) were commenting on recent remarks made by the prime minister and his new deputy on misreporting by the media, as well as plans to review laws to regulate Internet content.

This comes at a time when Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his administration are facing mounting criticism over their handling of the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) controversy, amid claims by the Wall Street Journal that nearly US\$700 million (RM2.6 billion) was channelled to the prime minister's personal bank accounts.

C4 director Cynthia Gabriel said going on the offensive to clamp down on social media will create a bigger trust deficit for Putrajaya and will not bury the scandals plaguing the administration.

"The only offensive Najib and his new Cabinet need to take on to win public trust is to tell the truth, answer the questions on the money into his personal accounts.

"Going on the offensive to clamp down on social media will create a bigger trust deficit, will not bury the scandal and will certainly not help him coming out smelling of roses," she told The Malaysian Insider.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) said on Monday that the money in Najib's accounts was from donors and not state investor 1MDB.

But this has not silenced critics, who are questioning the identity of the donors of such a huge sum and what the money was spent on.

Geramm coordinator Fazallah Pit said that if there were concerns that the media was spinning the news, Putrajaya could initiate legal action instead of issuing threats to journalists and suspending media organisations.

He said every media company had the right to determine the direction of its reporting, including making exposes, as long as they followed proper journalism principles and ethics.

"Surely this reporting ethics cannot be determined by politicians," he told The Malaysian Insider.

Fazallah also said it was arrogant of deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi to warn that action would be taken against the media for spinning news without prior warning.

He said Zahid was using it as scare tactic to restrict freedom of speech. Zahid said on Sunday that he would not 'compromise on spinning under his leadership'.

"Do not expect me to give warnings. Expect me to take action," said Zahid, who is also home minister.

Najib meanwhile had said that Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) legislation needed to be improved in order to 'rectify' a trend of 'trial by social media', which he said only benefited the opposition.

"This is not fair. When any news comes out about the opposition, people think it's not true. When any news is spread about us, people immediately think it's true," he said.

"We need to rectify this. MCMC laws must be improved to this end," Najib had said.

He had also said that he was not proposing to clamp down on freedom of speech, but added that every freedom must have its limits.

MCMC recently acted to block local access to Sarawak Report after the whistleblower site's series of exposes on 1MDB.

Najib's view echoed that of newly-minted Communications and Multimedia minister Datuk Seri Mohd Salleh Said Keruak who had said that the law that regulates Internet content in Malaysia will be amended to protect citizens from "slander" and "character assassination".

Last month, The Edge Weekly and The Edge Financial Daily were slapped with a three-month suspension for their reportage on 1MDB.

This morning (Wednesday) the publisher obtained leave from the courts to challenge the suspension by the Home Ministry. – August 5, 2015.

Copyright © 2015 Edge Insider Sdn Bhd

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/media-clampdown-wont-help-najib-say-pressure-groups>