

US 'very concerned' about Putrajaya's media crackdown
Malaysian Insider
March 3, 2016

The United States yesterday voiced concern about Malaysia's media crackdown and suggested that the extent of press and Internet freedom in the Asian country could affect prospects for expanded bilateral cooperation.

US State Department spokesman John Kirby said Washington was "very concerned" by Malaysia's recent restrictions of access to reporting on its domestic current affairs, including last week's blocking of access to The Malaysian Insider, a news portal.

The Malaysian Insider has published reports on the scandal around 1Malaysia Development Berhad and investigations into US\$681 million deposited into Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's bank accounts.

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission said the news portal had breached laws under the Communications and Multimedia Act, a 1998 law that bars using a website to publish "any comment, request, suggestion or other communication which is obscene, indecent, false, menacing or offensive in character with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass another person".

Najib has denied any wrongdoing over the money transferred into his account, saying that the funds were a political donation and that nothing was taken for his personal gain.

The US is also troubled that the government has failed to provide due process to targeted media groups before blocking access and has begun criminal investigations of reporters, editors and publishers, Kirby said.

"Of equal concern, many Malaysian social media users face charges for postings critical of the government and national leaders," he said, adding that Malaysian officials have spoken about legal amendments "that would further restrict online space".

He said the US hoped "to expand our cooperation" with Malaysia on shared challenges, adding "in that context, we urge the government of Malaysia to ensure that all its laws, existing and future, fully respect freedom of expression, including the free flow of ideas on the Internet". – Reuters, March 3, 2016.

Copyright © 2015 Edge Insider Sdn Bhd

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianoutsider.com/malaysia/article/us-very-concerned-about-putrajayas-media-crackdown>