

**The incomplete Abu Zahar press conference**  
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**Commentary by Mustafa K. Anuar**

THE accusation of misreporting levelled by Anti-Corruption Advisory Board head Abu Zahar Ujang against Malaysian journalists who covered his “tell-all” January 5 press conference is indeed disturbing.

At yesterday’s press conference, he claimed that their reporting was inaccurate and incomplete to the extent that it gave rise to negative responses from certain quarters and the public at large.

He added that this situation, in turn, had caused six board members to distance themselves from the stand he took regarding Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) chief Azam Baki’s alleged impropriety concerning the millions of shares he possessed.

Abu Zahar’s assertion seemed to imply that the board members were merely reacting to the flak they got from the public, and not necessarily because they thought it was the right and moral thing to do, which is to distance themselves.

Such denunciation against the media does not bode well, particularly for journalists who value the professionalism, credibility and integrity essential to the kind of work they do.

Not only that, Abu Zahar asserted that such misreporting could stain the reputation and integrity of the graft-busting agency, which is grave as the standing of the latter is obviously only good for as long as there is public trust.

To be sure, the local media have already been reprimanded by certain quarters for having reported on individuals who are accused of corruption, which, according to them, is a journalistic practice that is “sinful” in Islam.

Detractors wondered whether religion has been exploited by a few to help distract public attention away from the culpable.

The former Dewan Negara president revealed that there was communication between him and the six members after January 5, during which a plan was afoot for the board to have a meeting on January 8 to discuss the issue at hand.

Unfortunately, he said, the six board members met together without his presence and subsequently issued a media statement to present their collective stand.

If we recall correctly, the six board members distanced themselves from Abu Zahar on January 8 after the latter cleared Azam of any wrongdoing.

The clearance prompted Azam to insist that he was only answerable to the oversight board, and no one else.

However, at yesterday’s press conference, Abu Zahar admitted that his board has no authority to give such a clearance to Azam, which would leave

many concerned Malaysians agape because of the irony it evokes.

In journalism, there is a notion of right of reply to which an aggrieved party is entitled so as to provide space for response or further clarification.

Yesterday's press conference would have been an appropriate opportunity for Abu Zahar to fully explain his reservations about the supposed errors committed by a big group of journalists.

That is why it boggles the mind that Abu Zahar, reportedly, did not allow journalists to raise questions at the press conference. Such interaction would have enlightened both Abu Zahar and the journalists, as well as the general public.

It was clearly a missed opportunity for the parties concerned to sufficiently clear the air. If that was the press conference that Abu Zahar had in mind, he could very well do with issuing a press statement to the various media organisations.

Now, Malaysians are still left wondering, for instance, whether the disconnect between Abu Zahar and the board members has been resolved. And if it has not, why?

Does he think that the stand the board members took about the "clearance" was not a principled one?

Abu Zahar intimated yesterday he would deal with this issue of the board members on another occasion. One wonders why could he not wait to tie up some loose ends before calling for a press conference.

Members of the Malaysian public are curious, as they also want to ascertain whether the blaming of the media in this instance was not an act of trying to cover one's faux pas – as many politicians tend to do when they find themselves painted into a corner. – January 12, 2022.

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