

**By : DATO' SRI MOHD NAJIB BIN TUN HAJI ABDUL RAZAK
PERDANA MENTERI MALAYSIA**

Venue : Hotel Majestic, Kuala Lumpur

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Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh, salam sejahtera and good evening.

YB. Datuk Seri Ahmad Shabery Cheek,
Minister of Communication and Multimedia Malaysia,

Mr. Mokhtar Hussin,
President of National Press Club,

YBhg. Datuk Ahiruddin Attan (Datuk Rocky),
Chairperson of National Press Club,

Distinguished guests,

Members of media,

Ladies and gentlemen.

1. It is an honour to join you, and to present the winners of the main awards. I would like to thank the National Press Club for inviting me to this prestigious event to recognise and reward outstanding journalists.

2. We are here tonight to recognise and reward journalists who have made our society better; through their compelling stories, comprehensive analyses and momentous images. These awards celebrate quality journalism – and the quality journalists who deliver it.

3. I congratulate all those who have been listed for an award tonight. But I also want to pay tribute to the hundreds of journalists who work day in, day out – in rainstorms and on Hari Raya – in the service of truth. Through your eyes, we see our nation grow; we see its successes, and its struggles.

4. As Malaysia moves towards developed nation status, we need not just economic growth, but social development as well. And that includes a more open media environment.

5. A strong and vibrant media is an essential part of a mature democracy. When journalists are empowered, society can benefit. The press can hold governments, corporations and people to account. At its best, the media holds a mirror up to society; so that we may see our flaws, and fix them.

6. This power of scrutiny comes with responsibilities. And around the world, governments, regulators and the media are engaged in a discussion about the balance between media freedom and media responsibility.

7. In Britain, for example, revelations that newspapers had been bribing police and hacking the phones of murder victims led to a national inquiry, the closure of a 168 year old newspaper, and a debate about regulation of the press that is yet to be resolved.

8. With new technologies reducing the media cycle to milliseconds, the race to break stories has put new pressure on fact-checking and ethics. Even in a mature media environment, the precise blend of freedom and responsibility is a work in progress.

9. In Malaysia's young democracy, we too are finding the right blend between democratic scrutiny and responsible reporting.

10. Since coming to power, I have revoked the requirement to renew print licenses annually, and opened up the Home Minister's authority to block, allow or revoke licenses to judicial review.

11. And I have given my firm commitment to preserving the internet as a medium for free debate and open discussion. Online, and on social media, Malaysians daily exercise their right to comment and criticise.

12. This, too, is part of the democratic process. In a democracy, there will always be people who disagree with your policies, or disapprove of your government. I welcome criticism which is informed and constructive.

13. But there is a difference between legitimate criticism, and defamation. Defamation can be either primary – when someone makes a defamatory

remark – or secondary, when that remark is reproduced. Both are treated equally by the law.

14. It is my legal team's opinion that recent allegations by an online news portal overstepped the line. They have therefore issued a legal notice.

15. I want be very clear: this does not indicate any wider agenda. It is not part of any crackdown; it is not an attempt to silence critical voices. The law is blind, and any damages will have to fit the defamatory remarks. It is a matter of acting on specific accusations which cross the line from fair comment into slander.

16. Both government and opposition leaders in Malaysia have taken legal action against organisations which they believe have breached the law. And that is not unusual: in democracies, legal action against alleged defamation in the media is an appropriate recourse.

17. It is part of another balancing act: the balance between being open to constructive public criticism whilst holding public office, and the fundamental right to protect your dignity and your good name from being recklessly attacked as a result of political beliefs.

18. In today's self-reflective media environment – when online reaction to a story can become a story itself – all of us will occasionally get the balance wrong. What matters is how we react, respond, and move on.

19. In any multiracial and multi-religious society, there are pressures that must be managed. They are part of co-existence, just as brothers and sisters may squabble under the same roof. In recent years, we have seen racial violence in countries as developed as Sweden and as diverse as Myanmar.

20. In Malaysia, we often have a tendency to feel things passionately; sometimes we react hastily. Reflective and responsible reporting can act as a shock absorber, soaking up the impact of unguarded remarks. And in an age of citizen journalism – when individuals have as great a reach as newspapers – it is up to all of us to exercise this responsibility.

21. As our democracy grows, we must all work together – citizens, journalists, and politicians – to avoid inflammatory statements, and to ease tensions when they arise – no matter which part of the political or social spectrum they originate from.

22. Politicians have a responsibility not to seek cheap headlines with provocative remarks. Journalists have a responsibility to report accurately and fairly. And people have a responsibility to think about the content they share in the heat of the moment.

23. We should do so in the spirit of fairness, and in the service of truth: the same principles which guide tonight's winners, and the members of the National Press Club.

Wabillahi Taufiq Walhidayah Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabaraktuh and thank you.