

## Action against 'flaming' blogs: Belittle the king or Islam and you face the music

By V. Vasudevan

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KUALA LUMPUR: "The time for talk is over, now is the time to act." With this warning shot, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz said the government would be taking legal action against bloggers who flagrantly belittled Islam or the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. He told the Dewan Negara yesterday that three laws could be used against the bloggers: The Internal Security Act (ISA), Sedition Act and Section 121b of the Penal Code.

Section 121b deals with offences against the authority of the king, ruler or Yang DiPertua Negeri and carries a maximum penalty of life in prison.

Speaking at the Malaysian Press Institute Press Awards Night here yesterday, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the government was deeply troubled by the growth of "irresponsible" alternative media.

"In the name of freedom, these websites allow the broadcast of slander, lies and swearing, the use of harsh, degrading language and racial slurs without regard for the reader or those concerned," he said.

"Even though the government has been tolerant of anti-government positions and criticisms on the Internet, we are very concerned about statements that insult religion and reek of racism."

Najib said webmasters and web journalists were not exempted from the laws of the country and the government was duty-bound to protect the peace.

"We will not permit any party to disturb the nation's harmony and cause unease among the community," he said.

Nazri said the government was looking at formulating new laws allowing it to monitor and act against offending bloggers.

"This is in areas not provided for by the ISA, Sedition Act or Section 121b of the Penal Code," he said.

He said the proposed legislation was not intended to strangle the freedom of the Internet.

"This is to put a stop to the freedom to lie in the blogosphere.

"We want blogs to be clean, a place to obtain accurate information, a reference point for honest opinion, not a platform to abuse and slander people," he said.

Nazri told senators the government had lost its patience with bloggers who broke the law and it could not be "seen as impotent or weak" in the face of their defiance.

He said bloggers had come to believe they were like members of parliament, who enjoyed immunity to say what they wanted under the law.

"But the reality is that, despite the immunity, MPs and senators have to play by some basic rules.

"This is not the case with bloggers who flout the law. It is time to act, we have been very patient," he told cheering senators while replying to points raised during the debate on the Electronic Government Activities Bill 2007.

Senators used the opportunity to criticise bloggers against the backdrop of a police report lodged on Monday at the Dang Wangi police station by Umno information chief Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib against the Malaysia Today website for insulting the king and Islam.

Nazri told senators that writings describing Islam as "a big lie fabricated by Arabs who had put a huge rock (the Kaabah) in the middle of the desert were not only ill-mannered but could provoke anger among Muslims".

He said the hatred perpetuated by bloggers was spread further by those who read them.

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### **Gerakan man: Don't gag bloggers**

GEORGE TOWN: The government should stop going after bloggers, Gerakan central committee member Datuk Toh Kin Woon said yesterday.

Toh said the recent arrest of Nathaniel Tan, a blogger affiliated with the opposition Parti Keadilan Rakyat, and the call by Umno to take police action against the Malaysia Today website reflected a growing trend towards stifling dissent in the country.

He said that as the nation moved forward, the government could not be content with promoting development to the detriment of human rights.

"Civil and political rights such as the right to free speech, dissent and assembly are as important as economic rights such as the right to a job, housing, medical care and education."

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