

Editor wagers a month's pay that PM will repeal restrictive PPPA

A senior editor has wagered a month's salary that the restrictive Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, the law most cited by traditional journalists for fettering their freedom, will be repealed under Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Ahirudin Attan, the editor-in-chief of *Malay Mail* who is better known by his blogging persona Rocky's Bru, told a forum last night that should Najib serve his "full term" as premier, the country would see the end of the legislation which licenses publications and dictates what cannot be published by the print media. The PPPA also empowers the minister to suspend and withdraw publishing licences, without recourse for appeal to the courts.

Rocky announced the wager of a month's pay, which he said some had estimated to be as much as RM40,000, at the end of his review of Najib's performance thus far at the launch of *Najib's First 100 Days: No Honeymoon* written by journalist and new media editor Oon Yeoh.

The book, divided into eight chapters (among them media strategy, civil liberties, economic reforms, foreign affairs and race relations) and features guest writers including Rocky, was launched by DAP vice-chairman and senator Tunku Abdul Aziz at the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall.

Other speakers at the forum which followed included contributors to the book (among them Bersih spokesperson Wong Chin Huat, Centre for Independent Journalism executive director V. Gayathry, Merdeka Centre co-founder Ibrahim Suffian and political scientist Bridget Welsh) and Jelutong MP Jeff Ooi.

The panel members gave their perspectives of Najib's premiership based on their respective expertise.

Rocky, who kicked off the reviews, was the most kind to Najib and painted an optimistic scenario of the mediascape after giving a brief history of how past premiers managed the country's media, some by delegating the responsibility to their deputies.

However, he turned pessimistic when it came to the Pakatan Rakyat, saying he feared the media would face more restrictions should PR form the federal government. He based his gloomy prediction on the multi-million ringgit suits filed by PR leaders and the barring of reporters from the mainstream press by the Penang state government under Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng.

This brought a retort from Lim's chief of staff Ooi who said certain newspapers were barred because they twisted his boss' statements. However, Ooi said all journalists were invited to cover his events.

Gayathry, who spoke after Rocky, did not share his enthusiasm for Najib's handling of the media, saying certain sections of the mainstream press had adopted a more racial tone recently.

Wong, whose contribution to the book focused on the things which Najib did not do in his first 100 days as PM, made comparisons to the leadership styles of Najib and his late father Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.



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Welsh offered her view as an outsider and as the only non-Malaysian on the panel by talking about Najib's foray in foreign relations.

She said like all leaders who were handed the mantle of power by their parties and not through popular vote, Najib sought to shore up his popularity "externally" by turning to regional relations.

This, she said, was seen from Najib's first foreign visits as premier to countries which were strong trading partners with Malaysia and to economic powerhouse China. She expects him to go further afield, to the United States, Britain, Japan and Australia.

The two-hour discussion ended with a question-and-answer session. About 50 people attended the event.