

Press freedom in M'sia

KUALA LUMPUR: Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world, the media in this country has used the live broadcast approach for most media conferences on the crisis through various platforms especially social media.

Following the implementation of the movement control order (MCO) since March 18, media conferences on the directive were also broadcast live. Their purpose was to make sure that all information they wanted to convey, whether related to Covid-19 or the MCO, is transmitted directly to the public.

There were various views, both positive and negative, for the media conferences to be held live. However, many argued that this was evident of a growing degree of media freedom in the country.

University Putra Malaysia's Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Health Communication senior lecturer, Dr Tham Jen Sern (*pic*) said the live media conferences were a clear proof of the government's commitment to media freedom for the benefit of the people.

He said based on the live broadcasts, the people could not only assess the performance of a minister or spokesman in managing the crisis but also exposed their audience to the journalism profession.

"Usually when a country is in a crisis, media conferences are only run between ministers and media practitioners but now, with technology just at their fingertips,



viewers seemed to be at the media conferences to keep up with further developments on Covid-19 when they go live," he told Bernama.

He said the audience could evaluate themselves how the journalists asked the minister or spokesman and the interactions with the audience occurred when they could also ask the minister questions about their concerns through social media.

"Simultaneously, it not only demonstrates transparency in media freedom and freedom of speech to the people, but can also highlight the professional attitude of a minister or a spokesman in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic in the country by using the power of the media," he said.

He said that when the Covid-19 outbreak became a

global issue, the media indirectly played a role as a 'watchdog' to the government in providing authentic information to the people.

"The powers of social media and technology have caused information to spread widely in the blink of an eye, including fake news. The role of mainstream media is not only to provide accurate information but also to help the government filter out fake news.

"In maintaining the freedom of the media, at the same time the government has also not forgotten to suppress the spread of fake news professionally and simultaneously educate the public on trusting authentic information. This is because when Covid-19 becomes a global issue, all media have the same goal of communicating information and educating the people objectively about the pandemic," he said.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam)

described the media as playing an important role in reporting accurate and up-to-date information on the MCO to address the Covid-19 outbreak which was implemented on March 18.

According to Suhakam too, at the same time, the media was also combating fake news and untruths that could have caused anxiety and worry during the crisis.

Themed "Journalism without Fear or Favour" this year, the World Press Freedom Day is celebrated on May 3 every year since it was declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993.

According to the 2020 World Media Freedom Index released by the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) last April, Malaysia jumped 22 rungs to 101st spot among 180 member countries listed in the index.

In addition, the RSF said Malaysia was also ahead of regional partners in Asean including Indonesia (119), Philippines (136), Myanmar (139), Thailand (140), Cambodia (144), Brunei (152), Singapore (158), Laos (172) and Vietnam (175).

Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said apart from being proud of Malaysia's achievements in the index, the people should strive to put the press in a participatory approach with other stakeholders, namely the government, business and civil society as development partners.

- Bernama

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