

MEDIA STATEMENT

IDEAS: Malaysiakini's verdict and Gerakbudaya's raid present grave threats to freedom of the media and expression

Kuala Lumpur, 19 February 2021 – The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) is gravely concerned with the Federal Court's verdict that found Malaysiakini liable for contempt of court over its readers' comments. This decision presents a grave threat to press freedom and freedom of expression more generally, setting a worrying precedent in an already stifled media environment.

"Holding Malaysiakini accountable for comments posted on their site by the public seriously inhibits the role that independent media plays as a platform for debate and discussion. It is a serious blow in a changing media landscape where information has been democratised and essentially anyone can set up a website or media company. The decision today is a step backward for democratic accountability as well. If citizens cannot freely express their opinions on news portals, what are the avenues we have to keep the government to account?" comments Tricia Yeoh, CEO of IDEAS.

The police today also seized two computers from Gerakbudaya Enterprise Sdn Bhd, the publisher of former Attorney General Tommy Thomas' memoir. "Gerakbudaya as a publishing house should be allowed the freedom to publish books as they see fit. If there are indeed defamatory statements in Thomas' book, there are available legal avenues to address this, and due course should be adhered to. There have already been many police reports lodged against him and his book, and the police should be allowed to investigate these reports independently. Even so, it has been reported that the police have begun investigations over Thomas' book under the Official Secrets Act 1972 that should be amended and the Sedition Act 1948 that should be abolished.

At a time when the global trends are of transparency and accountability, it is increasingly worrying that the government continues to behave in ways that threaten freedom of the media and freedom of expression. This does not augur well with the state of democracy in Malaysia, and such democratic erosion is significantly impacting on our national economy and socioeconomic development more broadly, which will take years to reverse," concludes Tricia.

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About IDEAS

The Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) is a nonprofit research institute, dedicated to promoting solutions to public policy challenges, focussing on three overarching missions – advancing a competitive economy, ensuring trust in institutions and promoting an inclusive Malaysia. IDEAS is Malaysia's first independent think tank, free of personal interests and partisan influences. For more information, visit www.ideas.org.my.

For enquiries, please contact:

Amir Ridzuan Jamaludin
Assistant Manager, External Relations
+603 2070 8881/8882
amir@ideas.org.my