

MEDIA STATEMENT

18 April 2024

CIJ's Response To Najib's House Arrest Proceedings Being Held in Chamber and Barring the Media To The Judicial Review

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) is deeply concerned with [the High Court's decision to allow former prime minister Najib Abdul Razak's application to be heard in chambers, thus barring the media from covering his judicial review.](#)

While we respect the powers of the judiciary and judicial processes, it cannot be seen to undermine democratic principles. Najib Abdul Razak's bid to seek house arrest for the remainder of his jail sentence is a matter of utmost public interest and the basic tenets of democracy will require the judicial process to be transparent and not be shrouded in a cloud of secrecy. The public's right to information in an open, transparent, timely and meaningful manner must be protected and upheld at all times.

Barring the media and the flow of unbiased information on this case, effectively prevents the public from monitoring the outcome of a corruption case that rocked the nation and to hold all those accountable to the rule of law and for justice to prevail. The interests of political actors cannot supersede public interest.

The role of the media as the fourth pillar of democracy is key to keeping the public informed. Barring the media from covering matters that involve political expediency further undermines the trust in the judiciary and ultimately the trust in justice and democracy. Political expediency should not play any part in deterring the media as it actively prevents unbiased information from being reported and reduces the credibility of the media as they cannot play an active role in reporting on public interest matters. This further sets a precedent that the media cannot cover issues that involve political expediency and creates a system of opacity that leads to a trust deficit.

CIJ reiterates that the judicial system must be underscored by public interest and democratic principles, and there should be no semblance of double standards present within the system. Former prime minister Najib, an individual who is from a generational line of political elite, is seen to have disproportionately more access to justice than the general public. His recent partial pardon has already set a precedent where the grounds and justification for the decision are yet to be disclosed and made transparent to the public. Access to justice must be implemented fairly using public interest tests and international standards as a baseline. It is only by doing this can we begin to eradicate inequality in both

the political and judicial system and society as a whole. It is only then that people can once again be confident in the action of our legal and political system.

We urge the judiciary to reconsider the decision and keep the hearing public. All media must have full and meaningful access and keep the public informed accordingly. All semblance of “antara dua darjat” (inequality and double standards) must be removed and the principle of equality before the law must be upheld.

18 April 2024

Wathshlah G. Naidu

CIJ Executive Director

For further inquiries, please contact Lim Jih-Ming at comms@cijmalaysia.net

The Centre for Independent Journalism is a non-profit organisation that aspires for a society that is democratic, just and free where all peoples will enjoy free media and the freedom to express, seek and impart information.