

May 29, 2001

To: All News Editors

PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

We regret deeply in the controversy, which have been stirred by the take-over of Nanyang Press Holding Berhad by the politically linked Huaren Holding Sdn Bhd.

For the past one week, our members in Nanyang Siang Pau have been facing tremendous pressure by parties and groups concerned over this take-over which they feel will jeopardize press freedom in Nanyang Siang Pau.

We understand the pressure that has been placed on our members and we appeal to them to remain calm, rational and united during the difficult transitional period. They must prevent themselves from being instigated by interested parties.

We would have preferred greatly if Nanyang Siang Pau was not bought over by political parties or big businesses with political links.

One must understand that Nanyang Siang Pau had been through a 'Dark Age' for the past few years. We had a management that was unfriendly to the union and uncaring, which saw inappropriate displacement of staff, favoritism, cronyism and staff exploitation in the running of the newspaper.

Its understandable that the union would feel a relief when we learnt that a proposal had been put up to acquire Nanyang Siang Pau for we hope that the new management will bring new breath and changes to this Chinese daily.

It is unfortunate that Nanyang Siang Pau is being bought over by one of the component parties of the ruling Barisan Nasional. That is the root cause of this controversy.

We feel that this controversy would not have blown up if Nanyang Siang Pau were not sold to a political party or big businesses with political links.

Nanyang Siang Pau has been in operation for 78 years and has been serving the interest and the aspiration of the Chinese community. If the Chinese community decide to deny the contribution by Nanyang Siang Pau just because it has been taken over by Huaren Holding, it is not only unfair to Nanyang Siang Pau but also unfair to the journalists who have been serving the Chinese community over the years.

Nanyang Siang Pau should be allowed to carry out its duties to the Chinese community. Emotional statements and actions would only aggravate the morale of Nanyang Siang Pau staff.

As a trade union representing working journalist in Nanyang Siang Pau, we demand that MCA leaders should prove to the Chinese community and Nanyang readers that they will honour their assurance on non-interference into editorial policies.

The reputation of a political party will not improve just by filling up news pages with their activities and articles of their leaders. A political party gains respect and support from the community and the people by delivering results.

Having a lot of news coverage will not help political parties win support, if they can't deliver their promises and pledges to the people.

NUJ will continue to monitor the activities of Huaren Holding and ensure that this new owner of Nanyang Siang Pau does its utmost to improve welfare of workers and to run the newspaper professionally.

We also regret deeply the action of some Chinese NGO representatives who entered the premises of Nanyang Siang Pau under the guise of comforting our members but ended up harassing some of them. Such an incident should not recur in the future.

On the much debated press freedom, we like to point out that the operation of media is now heavily governed under the Printing Presses and Publication Act (PPPA). One way for greater press freedom in mainstream media would be through the amendment or repeal of this media law through an act of Parliament.

NUJ HQ has been calling for PPPA to be removed for many years, but the legislative body, which has been democratically elected by the people of Malaysia, is still not receptive to this call.

It is our hope that Malaysians will stand together with NUJ and urge their elected representatives in Parliament to remove this law.

NUJ Nanyang Siang Pau Branch is seeking a meeting with the new owner to renew the industrial relations and to ensure better benefits for working journalist and greater press freedom.



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