



THE Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) will be launching *Let's Talk About...*, a bilingual e-forum to encourage discussion on national socio-political issues among Malaysians.

Let's Talk About... (or in Malay, *Bicara Pasal...*) is an English/Malay e-forum that will make its debut online tomorrow (LetsTalkAbout.cijmalaysia.org). It intends to be both a source of information and a platform for expression on contentious issues affecting Malaysians, in the belief that "freedom of information is an essential factor in any serious effort to promote the peace and progress", as stressed in the first United Nations General Assembly in 1946.

Let's Talk About... kicks off with a series of articles on citizenship, federalism, indigenous rights, culture, civil law and shari'ah law, religious freedom, gender/sexuality rights, death penalty, rape, workers' rights, student rights and freedom of expression.

While some of these topics are such hot-button items that certain political and pressure groups are warning others not to raise them -- purportedly in the interest of maintaining harmony between all communities -- CIJ believes that left unaired and undefused, opinions, especially dissent, are time bombs that can be more damaging in the long term.

Written by straits-mongrel
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As said in the article on freedom of religion: “Unless we take the time to learn more about each other, ignorance and contempt will be the norm.”

And learning can only come with freedom of information and expression that is exercised responsibly. Again, in the words of the UN General Assembly: “Freedom of information requires as an indispensable element the willingness and capacity to employ its privileges without abuse. It requires as a basic discipline the moral obligation to seek the facts without prejudice and to spread knowledge without malicious intent.”

“We hope that Malaysian netizens will aspire toward the standards of when discussing in Let's Talk About...,” said CIJ Executive Officer Masjaliza Hamzah.

The e-forum will be launched off-line at Ops Bilang in Annexe Gallery, Annexe Central Market, Kuala Lumpur on 26 October, 8pm. The name is inspired from the Malay word meaning “to count” and “to tell”, as well as a play on “Ops Lalang”, an official crackdown launched on October 27, 1987, under the draconian Internal Security Act. In that 'national security' operation, a total of 106 people were arrested and four news publications closed down within days, creating a long-lasting climate of fear when it comes to the exercise of our civil liberties, especially freedom of expression.

Tomorrow, however, Ops Bilang will see artists, the hearts and souls of society, continuing the brave tradition of reclaiming our right to speak up on issues of public interest. The artists and activists are Amir Muhammad, Anne James, Fahmi Fadzil, Fahmi Reza, Jerome Kugan, Jo Kukathas, Mei Chern, Norhayati Kaprawi, Pang Khee Teik, See Tshiung Han, Vernon Adrian Emuang and Zedeck Siew.

Each artist-activist will stage a performance based on the articles in the first *Let's Talk About... series* -- on issues

such as citizenship, indigenous rights, civil and shari'ah laws, religious freedom, death penalty, student rights and freedom of expression.

Fahmi Reza, who will be presenting on student rights, explains his participation in Ops Bilang: "We should be able to talk about these issues without fear, rather than leave it to politicians. They should listen to us instead of we, them. We should have more such spaces to discuss important issues in public. These are our issues. We cannot always hope for others to solve the problem when they're our problems. Only through debate can we find a solution that suits us all."

And our conversations will continue online at LetsTalkAbout.cijmalaysia.org