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`Harakah restricted due to violation of permit conditions'

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THE publication of Pas' official newspaper, Harakah, has been restricted because the publisher did not adhere to the conditions of its permit, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

He said more severe action could be taken against the publication if it continues to break the law.

"When you break the law you expect to be punished. The law must be obeyed whether you are of the opposition or the Government. In this country we are impartial," Dr Mahathir said.

At a press conference after the opening of the Kankeiren Asean Management Seminar in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, the Prime Minister was asked if restricting the frequency of Harakah is a "punishment" against the publication.

The Home Ministry announced on Wednesday that Harakah will be allowed to be published twice a month to standardise the frequency of publication for all political parties. Prior to the expiry of its annual permit on February 28, Harakah was published twice weekly.

"The fact is that they broke the conditions of their publication. Opposition members cannot break the law and expect that they are priveleged and not have any action taken against them," he said.

Dr Mahathir said even members of the Government who break the law are taken to court, charged, and sentenced if found guilty.

"Harakah has been warned over and over again that they are breaking the law because they are supposed to circulate their paper only among their members. But they have been selling it to the public. They have been called and told not to but they continued, especially during the elections," he added.

Dr Mahathir said no action was taken against the publication during the general elections because people would accuse the Government of trying to suppress the opposition's views.

Asked why the Home Ministry did not ban the publication altogether, he said:

"We are really very gentle people. First we give a warning, then we give a second warning, and then a third warning, and then we take a gentle action against them. If they continue to break the law we will be more severe with them. We are not very crude like some countries in the West," Dr Mahathir added.

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