

Daily threatened racial harmony : Syed Hamid
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Home Affairs Minister Syed Hamid Albar today said he decided to stop leading Tamil-language daily newspaper Makkal Osai from being published because it had violated guidelines threatening racial harmony.

Makkal Osai's general manager SM Periasamy (below) yesterday said the daily received a letter from the home ministry refusing to renew its annual permit, without giving reasons.

makkal ossai banned 170408 05"We have media guidelines and we do not simply cancel a publication permit," Syed Hamid told state news agency Bernama.

"In the case of Makkal Osai, we do not cancel the permit but decided not to extend it," he added.

Syed Hamid said the guidelines stipulated that newspapers should not raise sensitive issues that could threaten racial harmony and the country's stability, Bernama reported.

However, he told Bernama the paper could appeal the decision.

Ethnic Indians, a minority in the Malay Muslim-dominated country, disagreed with the decision.

Government's revenge?

In the capital's Indian-dominated Brickfields neighbourhood, many were critical of the government's sudden action.

"The government is trying to silence the Indian community by banning the paper. We have expressed our anger in the elections and now they want to get revenge by shutting our news, this is wrong," restaurant owner Pradeep Kumar told AFP.

Opposition lawmaker Lim Kit Siang said the newspaper had been punished for giving too much coverage to the opposition since it made stunning gains in March 8 general election.

"It's the first sign of repression, a crackdown on human rights and the little space opening in the media after the March 8 political tsunami," he said in a statement.

Malaysia's media is largely state-linked and kept under tight control.

In the March polls, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's ruling coalition lost its two-thirds majority in parliament and ceded control of four states - raising the number of states in opposition hands to five.