

Gov't repeals ban on Makkal Osai
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The government has reversed its decision a week after banning MCPX Makkal Osai by renewing the Tamil daily's publishing permit today.

The newspaper, promising that it would be careful in the future, will hit the stands on Saturday.

makkal ossai renewed publication permit 240408 06The daily's general manager M Periasamy today told reporters that he renewed the permit at about 3.30pm after receiving a letter from the ministry in the morning stating that his appeal has been approved.

"We will be more careful. We won't run away from our responsibility (of maintaining racial harmony)," he said.

According to Periasamy, no conditions have been imposed for the renewal of the permit.

He thanked the government and the ministry in allowing the daily to continue. He also thanked the daily's faithful readers for their continued support.

Periasamy revealed that he had met with Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar two days ago to submit the appeal letter and to explain the daily's stand. He added that the minister did not explain why the permit was not renewed.

"He just said generally that all newspapers should maintain racial harmony," said Periasamy.

On April 16, the daily received a letter from the Home Ministry stating that its permit would not be renewed. No reasons were given for the ban.

Syed Hamid was later quoted in the media as saying that Makkal Osai had breached media guidelines but he did not elaborate.

makkal osai terminateThe daily, which is closely linked to former MIC deputy president S Subramaniam, subsequently filed an appeal.

Industry sources claimed that the ministry's decision was related to Makkal Osai's extensive coverage of opposition-related news and the Hindu Rights Action Force (Hindraf).

Makkal Osai is a widely read Tamil daily, ranking next only to Malaysia Nanban in terms of popularity. Nanban is still the best selling Tamil daily in the country. The MIC-linked Tamil Nesan is the third Tamil daily on circulation.

Syed Hamid: Why we change our mind

Syed Hamid said the decision to allow the newspaper to continue publishing was based on looking after the interests of the paper's employees.

"They are supporting so many people and... they assure that they will abide by the guidelines and they will contribute to our nation building efforts," Syed Hamid said.

"I think their request is reasonable and I renewed it (the permit) yesterday," he told reporters.

Syed Hamid had earlier said the daily violated guidelines stipulating that newspapers should not raise sensitive issues that could threaten racial harmony and the country's stability.

The minister said his ministry had not been pressured to act.

"There was none ... no political pressure. No one has come to see us except the newspaper. We never act under pressure. What we act on is in the interest of the country," he said.

Periasamy said that the daily suffered at least RM400,000 loss in revenue as a result of their shutdown.

"But now that we are back, we will continue to be the paper that cares. We will continue to report on Indian issues and continue to care about racial harmony," he said.

makkal ossai renewed publication permit 240408 05The daily's editor-in-chief M Rajen also thanked the other newspapers for their support and assistance in the past one week.

"Although this is a short period (one week), but for us it was a big struggle," he said.

Periasamy also said he agreed with a proposal made by Syed Hamid last year that newspapers need to apply for the permit only once, without the need for renewals as being practised now.

He said that it was a worrying time for all newspapers while waiting for their permits to be annually renewed, coupled with the "love letters" which they received from the ministry from time to time on coverage deemed to be controversial.

"Moreover, if you want to renew every newspaper, you only increase the workload of the ministry," he said.

Time to release Hindraf 5

Makkal Osai, or 'The People's Voice', has a circulation of 52,000 and was launched in 2005. It has a staff of about 100 people.

This is not the first time that the newspaper ran into trouble. On Aug 24 last year, the government lapped a one-month suspension after the Tamil daily published an image of Jesus Christ holding a cigarette and a beer can four days ago.

It was published as a weekly newspaper for 15 years before it became a daily in December 2005. It is an offshoot of Tamil Osai which ceased operations in 1990 following a management dispute.

In recent month, the daily however saw a decline in its circulation after Subramaniam buried the hatchet with his former nemesis MIC president S Samy Vellu who owns the rival

Tamil Nesan daily.

In an immediate reaction, opposition leader Lim Kit Siang welcome the lifting of the ban on Makkal Osai and urged the government to release the five Hindraf leaders held under the Internal Security Act.

"Syed Hamid should learn the lesson of the Makkal Osai faux pax and not repeat the same mistake of complying obediently and blindly the dictates of the 'Little Napoleons' in the bureaucracy and to bring to bear his higher duties and responsibilities as the minister ultimately responsible for all decisions made by his ministry."

He said that the minister cannot again pass the responsibility of the continued detention of the Hindraf 5 to the civil servants.

It was reported that the King has ordered for the five to complete their two-year detention after receiving the recommendation of the prime minister's Advisory Board

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