

**Minister defends Malaysia Today ban
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Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar said today that the prominent news portal Malaysia Today had been banned because it published "libelous, defamatory and slanderous" content.
MCPX

syed hamid albar putrajaya pc 310708 02"I think we don't intend to curtail people's freedom and right to give information and debate," Syed Hamid told reporters.

"But when you publish content that is libelous, defamatory and slanderous to other people I think it is only natural we take action," he said.

He defended blocking access to Malaysia Today that has attacked top leaders, saying it had ignored warnings against publishing "slanderous" articles.

"So many warnings and opportunities have been given and it is not heeded, so I am sure they have exercised their authority well under the law."

Malaysiakini reported yesterday that government-backed watchdog Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission had ordered all internet service providers (ISPs) in the country to block the errant website, whose founder Raja Petra Kamaruddin, has already been charged with sedition.

Mirror site still up and running

Raja Petra Kamaruddin, founder and editor of Malaysia Today, said a mirror site had been established with a foreign provider.

raja petra"I will fight the government action all the way. Their action will not stop me from writing," he said, promising to challenge the shutdown in court.

A check by Malaysiakini revealed that Malaysia Today mirror site is still up as at 4pm.

malaysia today website 270808Raja Petra is already facing a sedition charge and a defamation suit after linking Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak and his wife to the sensational murder of a Mongolian woman.

Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders ranks Malaysia 124 out of 169 on its worldwide press freedom index, and says the main media are "often compelled to ignore or to play down the many events organised by the opposition".

The government has previously threatened that bloggers could be punished under draconian internal security laws which provide for detention without trial.

'Stupid and foolish'

joseph salang anak gandum 00Meanwhile, Energy, Water and Communications Deputy Minister Joseph Salang surprised reporters when he said that he was unaware of the ban.

"MCMC may have informed the minister but not me."

However, Salang was certain that the action must have been taken according to guidelines.

"Each media mode must try and be sensitive in this multiracial community... if there is anything remotely sensitive then appropriate action will be taken," he said.

Information Minister Shabery Cheek said MCMC must have its reasons for blocking Malaysia Today.

"I am aware of the issue but it is not under my jurisdiction," he said.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Mohd Nazri Abdul Aziz said sensitive issues should be discussed within the perimeters of law.

If need be, he added, they should be done behind closed doors.

Citing the recent Bar Council forum on 'Conversion to Islam' as an example, the minister said it was 'stupid and foolish' as the open dialogue bothered people's emotions.

He then added that the Bar Council is unable to understand the feelings of Muslims as they are not Muslims.

Website ban unprecedented

Meanwhile, the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) has slammed the blocking of the popular blog site.

"The commission (MCMC) is going against the national commitments spelt out under the Bill of Guarantee of the Multimedia Super Corridor, which promises no censorship of the Internet," said CIJ executive director V Gayathry.

"By blocking the site, the first for a social/political content, the commission is reflecting the extent to which narrow political interests are dictating the rules of the game on expression over cyberspace."

She said that the MCMC had previously blocked pornographic sites while the Securities Commission also had dubious investment sites blocked, but this is the "first time such measure is used against a social and political site".

"The commission and the government should acknowledge that the problem at hand is the failure of the mainstream media to fulfil its duties in reporting information adequately, truthfully and fairly and not go on a witch hunt of content providers in cyberspace, which holds the only meaningful free space for critical and challenging expression in Malaysia."