

Putrajaya to review press act, but firm on race, religion issues
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PUTRAJAYA, Aug 17 — The Home Ministry will review the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) but will stand firm on issues involving race and religion, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said today, in response to the prime minister's promise to review the government's censorship policy.

The home minister told reporters today that a review of the law which requires all print media to apply for an annual license was one of the steps the government was looking at in fulfilling Datuk Seri Najib Razak's promise.

"Yes but let it be non-political and not at the expense of issues of race and religion," Hishammuddin said when quizzed on calls for the PPPA to be reviewed following Najib's pledge that current censorship laws would be reviewed.

However, he cautioned that "in a multiracial and multi-religious society, filtering must be done as absolute freedom can cause chaos."

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin had also said yesterday that the government will implement a special system to "monitor" the media, and that this mechanism will eventually replace censorship laws.

Najib had said that censorship laws are no longer effective in this day and age and can cause even more damage, citing the example of how his administration's blacking out of an article on the July 9 Bersih rally by The Economist garnered more negative reaction than the actual story itself.

Hishammuddin added today that Putrajaya would continue to pursue a Media Consultative Council (MCC) as a "self-regulatory body" which will draw a consensus from media practitioners themselves.

He said that the ministry had met chief editors from several newspapers yesterday to begin discussions on the proposal.

The Malaysian Insider had reported that several media heads had chosen to snub a meeting last month to discuss the MCC's terms of reference over fears that it would lead to even stricter press controls.

Under the PPPA, the print media can be punished under the "national security" clause while "false news" is punishable with a one-year imprisonment.

Critics of the law have described it as a sword hanging over the heads of publishers and editors, and exploited by the government to control dissent.

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