

**Book launched by Najib banned for 'promoting Shiism'**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
**April 30, 2014**  
**BY ELIZABETH ZACHARIAH**

A book launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak with much fanfare in 2012 by renowned local author Faisal Tehrani was banned by the Home Ministry last week, for purportedly promoting Shia teachings.

While Home Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, in a gazette dated April 22, did not relate the ban to Shia contents, he said "Perempuan Nan Bercinta" was "likely to be prejudicial to public order".

Najib, when launching the 410-page Malay-language book along with other titles in 2012, had said that novelists have the freedom to write in the country.

The book was published by Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia (ITBM), and printed by Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Berhad, both government-linked companies.

Faisal (pic, top left) told The Malaysian Insider that he was not sure why the ministry had decided to ban his novel now.

"I did hear then that Jakim (Islamic Development Department of Malaysia) was investigating complaints that it has Shia-related content," he said.

Faisal is no stranger to controversy as two of his earlier novels and a play were also probed by religious authorities although they were not banned.

"I have to say that I am proud that my book is now in the league of books by George Orwell, John Milton and Voltaire," he said, referring to famous Western philosophers whose writings were once banned in their countries.

"People do not remember the person who bans books but the books that are banned. So I have to thank them."

Faisal, a Fellow at the Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation in Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, revealed that this was the first "serious novel" to be banned in the

country since the British banned Putera Gunung Tahan by Pak Sako before Independence.

"And now that book has become the literature text in schools in a few states," he added.

The novel, like most of Faisal's writing, champions the rights of the oppressed.

The story is about a professor who becomes friends with a human rights activist and they both debate and have discussions on various issues.

"And the professor's views are non-mainstream Islamic views, which could have sparked the investigation by Jakim.

"But there are books out there in English on Shia which are not banned, so I do not understand it at all," Faisal said, calling it a violation of human rights.

He said that he would seek the advice of his lawyers over the ban but declined to elaborate.

Putrajaya has been targetting Shia Muslims in a campaign spearheaded by the government's religious officers and Umno leaders, with state television channels and mosques preaching to Malaysia's mainly Sunni Muslims on the dangers of Shiism, the second largest school of thought in Islam. – April 30, 2014.

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