

## Law suits set OB markers for foreign commentators

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It has been banned in Singapore since 2006, but many here will remember the *Far Eastern Economic Review's* legal battles with the Government.

Institute of Policy Studies research fellow Azhar Ghani said that the lawsuits against the magazine helped “set out the markers on where foreign commentators can go and are not supposed to go”, as well as “the benchmark on actions the Government is prepared to take” in response.

In 1987, the magazine published an article claiming that Mr Lee Kuan Yew, who was Prime Minister then, threatened to use Internal Security Act (ISA) powers against four Catholic priests and was against the Catholic Church. Mr Lee sued for defamation and was awarded \$230,000. In the 1970s, former journalist Ho Kwon Ping, now a successful Singapore businessman, was detained for two months under the ISA for articles published in the magazine deemed incendiary.

The 63-year-old magazine's most recent run-in with the Government was over a 2006 article on Singapore Democratic Party secretary-general Chee Soon Juan.

The High Court ruled last September that the publisher and editor of the magazine had defamed Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Minister Mentor Lee. By then, people were no longer surprised by the lawsuit, said Mr Azhar.

Political observer Ho Khai Leong, who recalled using the magazine for research in the 1980s when he was a graduate student, also noted its “very turbulent relationship with the Singapore Government” and how the lawsuits made it “a notorious news magazine in this city state”. Lamenting its closing, he said: “It had a very good reputation for in-depth coverage of (Asia-specific) politics and business news.”