

SA newspaper comes to Zimbabwe... and vanishes

By [Dumisani Ndlela](#)

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Zimbabwe's readership market had a pleasant surprise early this month after South Africa's Sowetan newspaper hit the newspaper stands, giving them an alternative to the state-owned dailies accused of churning out government propaganda.

Harare - However, they had another surprise this week after failing to find the newspaper on the market, sparking speculation regulators had banned its distribution on the country's streets. But an official at Munn Marketing, the company that was distributing the newspaper in Zimbabwe, said they had temporarily stopped bringing the newspaper from South Africa but could resume "anytime soon".

"We were testing the market but just keep watching because the paper might be back soon," the official said.

Zimbabweans have had to contend with having only two state-owned daily newspapers, the *Herald* and *Chronicle*, since the ban of the *Daily News* four years ago.

On 11 September 2003, the Supreme Court passed its "dirty hands" judgment against Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) publishers of the banned *Daily News* and *Daily News on Sunday*, refusing to hear the company's legal challenge on the constitutionality of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) on the basis that the publishing company had approached it with 'dirty hands' by declining to apply for registration as required under the repressive media law.

This subsequently led to the closure of the publishing company on 12 September 2003 when police, armed with automatic rifles, burst into the newspapers' offices in central Harare at about 5pm and ordered all staff to leave.

"The matter is still pending before the courts as the ANZ continues with its fight to be duly registered and licensed to resume publication as required under the restrictive Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) in what can easily pass as one the longest unresolved court cases in Zimbabwe's judicial history," said Nyasha Nyakunu, research and information officer for the Media Institute of Southern Africa (Zimbabwe).

The *Sowetan* would have joined South Africa's mainstream newspapers, the *Sunday Times* and the *Mail & Guardian*, which are distributed in Zimbabwe, are hot sellers because of their consistent coverage of Zimbabwe.

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