

BBC blasted for interviews with 'rejected leaders'
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Malaysia has lodged a protest with the BBC for airing interviews with "rejected" leaders of opposition political parties.

Information Minister Zainuddin Maidin criticised the British broadcaster for giving air time to opposition leaders he said had been "rejected" by voters - a veiled reference to ex-deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim.

He also said the move by the BBC would undermine bilateral relations between Malaysia and Britain, the state Bernama news agency reported.

"It would be appropriate if the air time was given to the opposition political parties that had a place in politics in Malaysia but why focus on people who have been rejected?" Zainuddin was quoted as saying by Bernama.

"What is the objective of the BBC in doing so?" he said.

Zainuddin, who recently visited the BBC during a working visit to London, said the broadcaster was not respecting the democratic decisions of Malaysians by featuring "rejected" opposition leaders.

He said he had protested the matter personally to a BBC editor while on his visit, according to Bernama.

The BBC in March aired an interview with Anwar in which he vowed to return to Malaysia's political stage, criticised the government on a range of issues, and accused it of corruption and nepotism.

Anwar was sacked from his post in 1998 by then premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad amid sodomy and corruption allegations, charges his supporters say were trumped up.

Malaysia keeps a tight control on its mainstream media and opposition parties say they often face a media blackout.

However, Malaysians still have access to overseas news channels such as the BBC and CNN via private cable television.

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