

CIJ: Dailies' near-blackout of Bersih may be political
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The coverage by several major dailies for this year's Bersih rally saw a huge drop compared with last year's, and may involve political interference, according to a study by the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ).

Based on its study, identical to one it conducted prior to last year's Bersih rally, it concluded that people might see the newspapers as purposely restricting their coverage, or acting under political pressure from the parties which own them.

newspaper reports on bersih2 rally 100711 new straits times "This can only fuel speculation that (the four papers) are deliberately toning down their Bersih coverage - at best, of their own accord, or at worst, due to interference from the government or the political parties which own them," it said in a statement today.

The press NGO monitored articles from four major newspapers from April 14, - English-language dailies The New Straits Times, The Star and theSun and, Malay-language Utusan Malaysia.

However, it did not include other major Malay-language dailies such as the Berita Harian, or any of the other Chinese or Tamil language newspapers.

The results of its study indicated that the coverage of Bersih in the two weeks before the rally this year had fallen sharply compared with the same period last year.

Drop in coverage sharp

Utusan Malaysia showed had a 97 percent decrease in Bersih coverage, with published 316 articles in 2011 and only 10 this year.

New Straits Times had a similar drop of 92 percent, with 97 articles last year and only eight this year.

The Star's also saw a huge dive, at 91 percent. It only had nine articles this year compared with 104 last year.

TheSun recorded the smallest at 62 percent, with 10 articles this year compared with 26 last year.

The group also analysed balanced coverage of the rally among the newspapers, finding that first two's were largely negative, that of the other two were more fair.

Coverage by Utusan Malaysia and New Straits Times were mostly negative across both years, while The Star saw a rise in the number of neutral articles published this year.

TheSun had the most balanced coverage this year, with eight neutral articles, and one negative and one positive.

It also noted that apart from theSun and Utusan, no other newspaper published Justice Rohana Yusuf's court order to Home Minister Hishammuddin Hussein last Wednesday, according to CIJ.

The Kuala Lumpur High Court order requested Hishammuddin clarify his stance on Bersih, as he had declared the organisation illegal in 2011 but allowed the Bersih 3.0 rally.

"The Star only published this news in its online version while New Straits Times did not publish it at all."

The poor performance of the print media in reporting accurately is at odds with Malaysia's rise in several global rankings of media freedom as well as the promise of liberalisation behind recent amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA), it contended.

"These statistics are a clear example of how the print media is still not free to report fairly and accurately in Malaysia.

"CIJ calls for a complete repeal of the PPPA and a review of the ownership of the print media by political parties," it said.

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