

**Mainstream media's Bersih coverage 'off tangent'**  
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**By Hazlan Zakaria**

The mainstream English and Malay language newspapers' coverage of the Bersih 3.0 pro-electoral reform rally last Saturday is "disappointing" say senior journalists.

Anbalagan NUJ secretaryNational Union of Journalist (NUJ) secretary-general V Anbalagan (left), who was on the ground for his publication on the rally day, said as an eyewitness he believed the English and Malay mainstream print media's reports were "off tangent" and different from what he saw for himself.

Enough, he said, and asked: "Has the (mainstream) media failed us?"

"Their reports about Bersih were not balanced," he lamented, adding that organisers and others lambasted for the rally were not given room to have their say.

"I shudder to think what this would bode for the general election coverage," he said, expressing the concern that the spectre of lopsided reporting will forever haunt the Malaysian media.

Similar non-objective reporting was also the norm in electronic broadcast media stations, mainly state-owned or controlled by political interests, lambasted the NUJ secretary-general.

Anbalagan's views were supported by veteran investigative reporter M Krishnamoorthy.

"Looking and studying the coverage of the mainstream newspapers... if you ask me honestly, they were not telling the truth (about Bersih 3.0)," Krishnamoorthy said.

The former NST and The Star journalist who now freelances for several foreign news agencies said the mainstream Malay and English dailies were clearly not objective in their reports.

No room for differing viewpoints

Though both Krishnamoorthy and Anbalagan agreed that compared with their Malay and English language media brethren, the Tamil dailies gave somewhat balanced reports while the Chinese language newspapers were the most balanced.

Anbalagan is concerned such lopsided reporting is draining whatever credibility the mainstream press still have. It is chasing away their readers into the waiting hands of alternative and online news, which give more room for differing viewpoints.

"They have cried wolf so many times that even if the mainstream media was telling a true story, no one will believe it."

Ambalagan and Krishnamoorthy were speaking at a forum organised by the Selangor University (Unisel), NUJ and the Asian Institute for Development Communication (Aidcom) in conjunction with World Press Freedom Day.

The journalists' laments echoed observations by watchdog groups that have condemned the mainstream media's coverage of the rally as being heavily censored and failing to address the truth of what happened on the ground.

The sit-in protest pushing for clean and fair elections, which started off peacefully, was already over when a group allegedly breached a police cordon ringing the iconic Dataran Merdeka.

The alleged incident triggered violent police response not only against those who breached the cordon but resulted in kicks and punches thrown at other protesters, the public and even journalists, including several from the foreign media.

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