

**CIJ suspects orders guided Bersih rally coverage**  
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**By Koh Jun Lin**

There may have been orders interfering with several major dailies' coverage of Bersih 3.0, said Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) media monitor Ding Jo-Ann.

She based her conclusion on the results of her study comparing last year's coverage of Bersih 2.0 with this year's by *Utusan Malaysia*, *New Straits Times*, *The Star*, and *theSun*, and found a sharp drop in the number of articles on the event except in *theSun* that registered only a slight drop.

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"Otherwise if it is just a newsroom going about its business, how do you explain the drastic difference in the number of stories reported last year and this year," Ding (*left*) said when presenting her findings at the launch of CIJ's annual Freedom of Expression in Malaysia 2011 report last night in Kuala Lumpur.

The findings are not incorporated in the report, which only covered last year's studies.

Ding's study looked at press reports, letters and editorials published between June 25, 2011 to July 11, 2011, and April 14 this year to April 30, which respectively covers the two weeks before and two days after Bersih 2.0 and Bersih 3.0.

She found that the Malay-language broadsheet *Utusan Malaysia's* reports dropped by 76 percent from 372 articles in 2011 to 88 in 2012.

The English daily *New Straits Times* coverage of Bersih rallies dropped by 84 percent from 229 reports to 37, while *The Star's* fell by 81 percent from 223 to 44 reports.

*theSun*, a free newspaper that is distributed only on weekdays, had a much milder drop of 34 percent from 35 articles to 23.

In addition, she had found that *Utusan Malaysia* had quoted Bersih's organisers as a source only three percent of the time both last year and this year, and sources other than those from BN, the authorities, and Pakatan Rakyat about half the time.

In contrast, *New Straits Times*, and *theSun* quoted the Bersih steering committee roughly ten percent of the time when covering Bersih 2.0, and just over 20 percent of the time when reporting on Bersih 3.0.

The Star quoted the organisers 13 percent of the time in both years.

“This is a rally by Bersih but the quotes from Bersih (by *Utusan Malaysia*) are so negligible compared to everyone else who they quoted, especially last year where they quoted all manner of relatively obscure and unheard of NGOs.

“This year, it is still the same,” said Ding, who is also a writer and columnist at the online news site *The Nut Graph*.

She also said that all media including the online media were too preoccupied with “chasing quotes” and failed to answer big picture questions.

She gave the example of the UK newspaper *The Guardian*'s coverage of people charged for last year's London riots for what questions that might have been asked.

This included collecting data from about 1,000 rioters charged, and found that the courts were handing out sentences 20 percent more severe than sentences for the same crime committed at other occasions, suggesting bias in the courts.

Their other findings also refuted assumptions that the rioters were mainly non-white, and that the riots were not linked to poverty. Instead, they found an ethnically mixed group of youths, 58 percent of whom lived in the bottom 20 percent poorest neighbourhoods.

“All the time, when something happens, and we just run around getting quotes from people, even hiding and distorting facts. We missed the opportunity for real nation-building and for a really thoughtful discussion,” she said.