

**BBC's HARDtalk denies bowing to Putrajaya
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The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has denied that it bowed to pressure from the Malaysian government in dropping its HARDtalk interview with infamous blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin which was slated for today.

"The suggestion that the item was dropped due to political pressure is untrue," said the BBC to Malaysiakini in an emailed statement early this morning.

The broadcaster's statement came hot in the heels of speculations that the Malaysian government has exerted pressure to snuff out the interview with the controversial member of the Selangor royal family who is in self-imposed exile in London.

azlanThe Malaysian blogosphere was rife with talks that the station had dropped the interview with Raja Petra with some suggesting that this may be done in order to appease Putrajaya.

This was following a statement posted on Malaysia Today on Aug 29, a website owned and operated by Raja Petra, announcing that the much anticipated interview was cancelled.

In the statement, HARDtalk producer Bridget Osborne was quoted as saying that "questions they would delve into, which would be very sensitive in nature and critical of the government, would run foul of the Malaysian government."

Raja Petra also posted a screen capture of a Facebook conversation he had with Nicholas David Blakemore, a BBC planning editor detailing the broadcaster's suggestion for an interview as proof that he was indeed approached by the British broadcaster in the bid to quash accusations that he had lied about the HARDtalk interview.

According to the BBC Global News senior press officer Peter Connors, the BBC regularly researched many stories for its programmes, one of which was an interview with Raja Petra on HARDtalk, though not all eventually went to air.

"It is the normal process of news and current affairs throughout the media that not all make it to air for a variety of editorial reasons," the BBC representative explained in the statement.

'Issues of defamation'

In the Raja Petra case, Connors conceded that they cancelled the interview because of legal concerns:

"It became clear in our research any comprehensive interview with former Malaysia Today editor Raja Petra would prominently feature issues that are currently the subject of a current court case in Malaysia, which raise issues of defamation."

Rather than the fear of running afoul of the Malaysian government, the BBC is contending that to report the details on an ongoing court case may be construed as subjudice, which could lead to contempt of court.

Connors also maintained that all BBC programmes adhere to the same strict editorial

guidelines which ensure complete editorial independence and impartiality.

NONEHARDtalk, a 30-minute talk show, prides itself on no-holds-barred interviews with controversial newsmakers around the world.

Notable Malaysians who have made it to the show's line-up included former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his arch-nemesis, opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim.

The cancellation of the Raja Petra interview raised eyebrows as it is very rare for the relatively independent BBC to axe controversial content, especially for HARDtalk, which was widely hailed as a hard-hitting news programme.

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