

**The RPK blip, bleep and the Beeb**  
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COMMENT The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was right to dismiss a HARDTalk non-interview with fugitive blogger Raja Petra Kamaruddin (RPK) who fled to the United Kingdom from pending law suits in Malaysia. RPK's mother is Welsh and in all probability he has British nationality and is immune from extradition to Malaysia.

The BBC researches many topics every month for not only HARDTalk but its variety of other programmes and not all make it to the air. This is similar to other media organizations that are swamped with news stories but not all are published. These organisations can't be accused of blacking out the news that remains unpublished although this does happen but not with run-of-the-mill stuff which are also needed as fillers and the like.

Generally, media organisations try to follow a certain tried-and-tested formula in order to maintain their ratings viz 5 per cent excellent, 15 per cent good and the rest average. It's not possible to have 100 per cent excellent all the time and even if it was possible, there's no way any media organisation can maintain the momentum of such coverage for long.

The result is that when a media organisation drops from 100 per cent excellent to the usual formula, it will be very quickly noticed as having "dropped in standards".

Consistency is also the name of the game as with any product.

Every tin of Milo, for example, is consistent in its contents i.e. in colour, texture, taste and a host of other criteria. How much quality can a big tin of Milo give for RM20 before running themselves out of the business?

The consistency approach can also be seen with fast food chains, brand names and even roadside mamak teh tarik stalls. A good teh tarik mamak knows what makes for a good cup of the brew that draws in the crowd. The proof of the pudding is in the eating which the bad establishments have yet to learn.

True, the BBC has even aired tyrants and dictators on HARDTalk and its many other programmes.

An example is former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. This does no discredit to the organisation since Mahathir is in a position to do enormous damage given his influence on the Malaysian government. Mahathir is one of those who can make a difference for the worse.

Similarly, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) advisor Anwar Ibrahim was aired to balance the Mahathir interview, whichever came first. Anwar can also make a difference either for the better or worse. So, he made the grade for a BBC interview.

There was also a need with Anwar to gauge how seriously the agenda for change and reform in Malaysia was proceeding given the ruling Barisan Nasional's (BN) more than half-century grip on the country.

Besides, after leading the opposition alliance to victory with a five-state win in the last General Election in 2008, Anwar had something to tell. The fact that it could be a flash-in-the-pan which he achieved by jumping on Hindraf's makkal sakthi (people power)

phenomenon is beside the point.

An equally pertinent question to consider in the case of Anwar is the Law of Inertia: "A body at rest, tends to stay at rest, unless acted upon by external forces. A body at work, tends to stay at work, unless acted upon by external forces".

We have to await the outcome of the next General Election in 2013 or earlier to see this law at work. In all probability, given the absence of external forces except for the minor sodomy II charge against Anwar, the status quo will remain in Malaysia with Perak even going back to the opposition alliance.

RPK, no matter how important in his estimation, is not even average. It would do no credit to the BBC to air someone like him and compromise their credibility for newsworthiness.

They went through their research proposal briefly and in the end wisely decided that they are not going to make any difference for the better or worse by having him on air. In all probability, he will just repeat his usual "Elvis is Still Alive" kind of outrage which merits, according to his claims, a considerable number of hits every month.

The trashy tabloids which thrive are similar to the RPK blog and have a tried and tested formula as well based on two maxims: mix a little truth with a lot of fiction to purely entertain; and tell a thousand other lies to cover the first lie. This is a never ending game as many bloggers like RPK have discovered to their eternal fascination and the horror of others.

RPK knows that he was never for a minute even considered for an interview for HARDTalk. But he latched on to a routine enquiry from BBC to spin the yarn that the Malaysian Government must have put the pressure on the world-famous British media organisation to drop the so-called interview. And so he has yet another fairy tale to spin for his gullible readers.

His readers plan to protest against the BBC, according to RPK's own spin, as if that would make it "back down" on their non-decision on a non-issue. This is an organisation that has even thumbed its nose at British Government requests. So, no one for even a moment thinks that the BBC would entertain any interference from the small government of an increasingly weak country like Malaysia.

When RPK tried to desperately contact London-based Hindraf Makkal Sakthi chairman Waythamoorthy Ponnusamy, the latter was understandably very wary and kept a good distance from him. RPK used a go-between to get Waythamoorthy to see him but the latter rebuffed all attempts. Finally, RPK turned up one morning at Waythamoorthy's door himself. He was virtually shown the door.

Subsequently, he went on a tirade against Hindraf, labeling it and the Ponnusamy brothers – including the elder Uthayakumar – as racists. Hindraf did not dignify RPK's attacks with any rebuttal.

In a statement that make no reference whatsoever to RPK, Hindraf has explained that "a racist is one who denies other people their rights in the sun".

In the case of Hindraf, it was further explained, the ad hoc apolitical movement was only fighting for the rights of the marginalized to have their place in the sun without depriving others, in the process, of their rights".

Hindraf sees no need to speak up for others but to focus only on the plight of the marginalized. This has been latched on by RPK to label Hindraf in his blog as racist since "it doesn't speak up for all but only one group".

Is it any wonder therefore that the BBC has found RPK not newsworthy enough or credible to appear on its HARDTalk show?

RPK neither makes a difference for the better nor for worse. He's in the non-news category. No news is bad news. Bad news is good news. When a dog bites a man, it's not news. When a man bites a dog, it's news.

It's more likely that Hindraf's Waythamoorthy will soon appear on a BBC show. Even hardcore Malay racists in Malaysia concede, albeit grudgingly, that Hindraf Makkal Sakthi makes a compelling case.

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