

**Utusan tried hard to portray Bersih as 'evil', Suhakam inquiry told**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**April 13, 2012**  
**By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 13 — Utusan Malaysia was among four newspapers that consistently portrayed Bersih 2.0's last July 9 rally negatively, a media watchdog said today.

Ding Jo-Ann, a representative from the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) told the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) that a recent study on media coverage of the last Bersih rally found that the polls reform group was not given adequate coverage.

"Utusan's reports, for instance, was overwhelmingly negative, alarmingly so. There were personal attacks against (Datuk) Ambiga (Sreenevasan), a concerted effort to portray Bersih as evil.

"Utusan coverage would have strengthened the use of violence against Bersih participants," she told Suhakam commissioners Datuk Dr Khaw Lake Tee and Detta Seman.

CIJ's study conducted from June 25 to July 11, said Ding found that only three per cent of Utusan's reports carried remarks from Bersih organisers, while the brunt of the Umno daily's coverage quoted groups and "anonymous" sources who were against the Bersih rally.

"Utusan even carried anonymous sources alleging that Bersih was funded by foreign organisations, Christian groups," added Ding.

Comparatively, she said, papers such as the New Straits Times, The Star, and The Sun gave slightly better coverage, but that it was still lacking.

"A casual reader would have found it difficult to understand the purpose (of the July 9 rally) from these papers, if relying from these as sources," she added.

Bersih's third rally for free and fair elections will go on from 2pm to 4pm at Dataran Merdeka this April 28.

But this time, the gathering will also be joined by simultaneous events across the country, likely adding pressure to the government to accede to the group's demand for a total reform to the country's election processes.

Bersih's previous rally on July 9, 2011 turned chaotic when the authorities employed huge teams of riot police, armed with water cannons and tear gas launchers, to disperse the crowd of thousands.

The crowd had converged on the streets of the capital from the early hours of July 9, defying earlier warnings that their participation could result in arrests.

Over 1,600 people were detained as a result, including Bersih chief Ambiga and scores of opposition lawmakers, but Bersih 2.0 later declared the event a success based on the number of participants and the publicity it had earned in both local and international media.

The government moved quickly to enact the Peaceful Assembly Act after the event and formed the PSC for electoral reforms, but Bersih 2.0 maintains that these moves were insufficient.

Ambiga has pointed out that the PSC's 22 recommendations had failed to deal with specific discrepancies in the electoral roll.

These include duplicate voters, overly large numbers of voters registered to a single address, the existence of deceased voters, and a suspicious spike in the number of civilian and postal voters, among many other similar irregularities.

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/utusan-tried-hard-to-portray-bersih-as-evil-suhakam-inquiry-told/>