

Dr M says was 'shocked' Putrajaya censored Economist
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PUTRAJAYA, Sept 12 — Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed today asserted that the government should not have censored an article by The Economist on the July 9 Bersih rally, and said he was "shocked" when he found out about it.

"I was shocked The Economist was censored. It was an action which should not have been done. It was unnecessary... you can read it online on the Internet (anyway)," he said today during a live television interview with government broadcasters RTM.

Censors had blacked out parts of an article in the July edition of The Economist that had called Putrajaya's handling of the Bersih rally "overzealous".

Among the parts blacked out were mentions of the heavy-handedness of the police and the accusation that the government withdrew its offer for protesters to use a stadium for the rally.

The article titled "Taken to the cleaners — an overzealous government response to an opposition rally" chronicled the chaos on July 9 when police fired tear gas and water cannons to disperse the tens of thousands of Bersih supporters who took to the streets of Kuala Lumpur to demand electoral reforms.

Although the full article was available online, the Home Ministry still inked out four lines in the article, one of which notably reported on the death of one man during the rally.

Today, Dr Mahathir said that the current government administration could no longer practise methods that were used by previous administrations.

"Things have changed now, it is different...but (somehow) the mindset is still old-fashioned," the former prime minister said.

The Economist previously noted that Malaysia has a history of censoring its articles.

In an article written last September, The Economist said the Home Ministry often expurgated stories "that it judges may offend Muslims, among other things".

"Images can also prompt action. The cover of last year's Christmas issue showing Adam and Eve was censored in five countries. Malaysian officials covered up Eve's breasts," the article added.

The weekly had also listed Malaysia third below India and China on its chart of the 12 countries that either censors, bans or confiscates copies of The Economist.

The weekly is sold in over 190 countries worldwide.

According to the chart, Malaysia has censored 11 issues between January 2009 and August 2010 while India has censored 31 issues. China has censored 13 and either banned or confiscated 12 issues.

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