

Astro says BBC's Bersih coverage cut to suit local rules
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, May 2 — Astro has admitted to censoring the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Bersih 3.0 coverage but expressed disappointment with the global news channel for failing to understand the satellite pay television provider did so to comply with local guidelines.

Astro broadcast operations senior vice-president Rohaizad Mohamed explained to The Malaysian Insider that the 2:16-minute clip was cut in accordance with national content regulations. However, the clip contained shots where Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim spoke to reporters.

Rohaizad did not divulge further details on what the regulations were but said that Astro reserved the right to "edit" content from international providers and channels as it sees fit.

"We are surprised and somewhat disappointed that our long-standing partner, the BBC, when, issuing its statement, did not take cognisance of the duty of Astro to comply with local content regulations," the Astro senior executive said in a statement last night.

In a statement emailed to The Malaysian Insider on Monday night, BBC complained about Astro's censorship of its brief coverage of Saturday's rally, which saw local police fire tear gas and water cannons to disperse protesters.

"We would strongly condemn any blocking of the trusted news that we broadcast around the world including via distribution partners," a BBC spokesman has said in the statement.

The British public service broadcaster added that it was making "urgent enquiries" to Astro to seek its reasons for censoring its two-minute coverage of the violent protest.

According to the YouTube link available in the statement, BBC's coverage of Bersih 3.0 had been shortened by several seconds to exclude clips of short interviews with two protesters.

In the first censored interview, a man, believed to be Chinese, had told the BBC that the police took unprovoked action at protesters despite efforts to negotiate.

"They fired a shot at us and instead of saying sorry, we know it was an accidental shot, they shot some more; we were about to talk and make peace and negotiate but they shot at us," he said, referring to tear gas fired at the protesters.

In the next interview, an Indian man had explained his reason for joining the rally for free and fair elections, which had turned violent at nearly 3pm on Saturday.

"I'm here to see that we have free and fair elections. That's all.

"We want the Election Commission (EC) to be independent and clean. At the moment, it is

not clean. Okay? So I have to stand here because this is a day of destiny for Malaysians," he said, amid a backdrop of hundreds standing before the barricades surrounding Dataran Merdeka.

Local TV operators had also slashed another portion of BBC's report, which showed scenes of the riot police's fire-red water cannon trucks firing chemical-laced water at protesters.

A part of the BBC correspondent Emily Buchanan's words were also clipped along with the scene.

"It's not entirely clear how the violence started," she had said in the portion of the clip that was aired.

"... but after the rally was declared a success and people began to go home, the barriers were breached..." she said in the censored portion.

"... and the authorities fired tear gas at the crowds," she continued, as the scene continued.

This is not the first time local censors have slashed media coverage of Bersih's protests in Malaysia.

Following the election watchdog's last July 9 rally, censors had blacked out parts of an article in *The Economist*, which had called Putrajaya's handling of the event overzealous.

The article titled "Taken to the cleaners — an overzealous government response to an opposition rally" had chronicled the chaos on July 9 when police fired chemicals to disperse tens of thousands who had gathered to demand electoral reforms.

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

The Home Ministry had also used black ink to blot out portions of the article that mentioned the death of one protester and the alleged bombardment of chemicals into the compound of the Tung Shin Hospital.

Last Saturday's opposition-backed rally, Bersih's third since 2007, has already received negative coverage in the foreign media, many of which have predicted a likely backlash for the Najib administration.

According to BBC, "despite the massive turnout, the government appears to be in no mood for change and there could be an election in June, too soon for major reforms to take effect.

"That means many more political battles ahead."

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