

Rais defends Astro, says 'best parts' of BBC Bersih clip shown
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By Anisah Shukry

KUALA LUMPUR, May 2 — Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim today defended Astro's censorship of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Bersih 3.0 coverage, stressing that the satellite pay television provider should be given credit for showing only the "best parts" of last Saturday's protest for electoral reforms.

"Each broadcasting house is at liberty to exercise its own style of eliciting the best news item for its station.

"It has to be given credit for knowing which part of the news is newsworthy and therefore they should exercise that within their rights of itself as a broadcasting firm," the information, communication and culture minister told reporters here today.

He added that in the case of Bersih 3.0, or "Kotor 3.0", as he put it, the coverage had been edited so that only the "best part" was aired by Astro.

He stressed that each television station had the right to "edit" news at their discretion as such items could "run into hours".

Astro has admitted to censoring the BBC's Bersih 3.0 coverage. — file pic
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 was shown speaking 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, the 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 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 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.

The BBC said in a statement it was "surprised" and "disappointed". — file pic
"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.

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