

Free press rank will drop after police assault on reporters, says DAP
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By Ida Lim

KUALA LUMPUR, May 3 — DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng today suggested that Malaysia will have a lower ranking in the World Press Freedom Index as a result of violence against reporters in Penang's anti-Lynas protest and the Bersih rally for electoral reforms.

"There is no doubt that press freedom in our country is deteriorating and getting more restricted," said Lim, referring to last Saturday's Bersih sit-in protest where the police allegedly beat up reporters and destroyed their equipment.

"The fact that the police did indeed beat up members of the media is irrefutable," he said.

"Worse, BBC and Al-Jazeera's news coverage was censored by Astro for breaching local content regulations. To date, neither the Home Ministry nor Astro has clarified what the local content regulations were," said the Bagan MP (picture).

The two international news providers had complained that Astro had edited their coverage of the Bersih rally.

Lim said that Malaysia went up 19 places to the 122nd place out of 178 countries in the 2011-2012 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders.

However he said that Malaysia's ranking "is set to take a dive" as a result of the violence against reporters.

He also said that Malaysia used to be 92nd in the same index in 2006.

The Penang chief minister remains sceptical over the effectiveness of police investigations over police brutality in the Bersih rally, citing the February 26 anti-Lynas protest in Penang where no action was taken by the police on 'gangsters' who beat up reporters.

"Until and unless an Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC) is formed and the Printing Presses and Publications Act abolished, there will never be true press freedom in Malaysia," he said in his statement on World Press Freedom Day.

Local censors had also slashed media coverage of last July's Bersih protest 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.

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