

Astro admits censoring BBC report on Bersih 3.0

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Satellite TV network Astro has admitted to censoring the BBC news report on the Bersih 3.0 rally it aired last Saturday "to comply with the national content regulations".

In a statement to *Sarawak Report*, the whistleblower website that exposed the censorship, Astro senior vice-president of broadcast operations Rohaizad Mohamed said the private paid TV station has the right to edit the international channels it airs.



"As a licensed broadcaster, Astro is required to comply with the national content regulations.

"When it comes to international content providers, Astro reserves the right to edit their channels for the purposes of complying with the content regulations," he said.

However, Rohaizad did not explain what these local content regulations were.

Astro disappointed with BBC

BBC had, in a statement issued after being alerted by *Sarawak Report* on the censorship, said it was making "[urgent enquiries](#)" made into the matter in order to "establish the facts".

"During the week of World Press Freedom Day, it would be deplorable if access to independent and impartial news was being prevented in any way.

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



Obviously this statement did not go down well with Astro.

"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," Rohaizad said.

Sarawak Report had last Sunday highlighted a video uploaded on *YouTube*, comparing the original BBC broadcast and the censored version aired by Astro.

According to the website, 30 seconds of the original report had been removed from the

censored version on Astro, after the removal of three separate sequences, one which showed a policeman on a motorcycle apparently firing at demonstrators.

The two other sequences that were removed were on interviews with demonstrators, explaining why they felt they had to take to the streets to defend the right to free and fair elections.

The report was included in BBC World, one of the channels available on Astro. BBC reporter Emily Buchanan produced the two-minute report on the Bersih rally, according to the website.



What are national content regulations?



Sarawak Report said the removal of these scenes could be judged to have introduced a bias away from the more even-handed and objective approach of the original report, in an attempt to show the police and the government in a better light.

"In fact, Astro is prepared to go further. It not only censored the BBC report, but it did so without informing its Malaysian audience. Malaysian viewers were misled into thinking that the doctored report was the genuine voice of the BBC!"

The website said it would seek clarification from Astro on the details of the censorship and also request a copy of the national content regulations.

"We ask whether such arbitrary tampering and doctoring is seriously what has been laid down by the BN government when it comes to national content regulations?

"If so, who makes these decisions and on what grounds are the public being deliberately misled in this way at short notice at the whim?" asked the website.

BBC and Al Jazeera urged to act

In addition, *Sarawak Report* also claimed that another Bersih 3.0 report broadcasted on Astro by international broadcaster *Al Jazeera* was also tampered with.

"We also now have information that *Al Jazeera*'s reporting was likewise restricted on the Bersih coverage. This means that the role of Astro is to draw the wool over the Malaysian people's eyes, not only about events in their own country but over what is being seen about their own country by the rest of the world!"



The website urged both BBC and *Al Jazeera* to take further action in order to safeguard their reputation.

"How these programme makers respond will define their trustworthiness as news organisations and reveal to the world what comes first, money or the truth?

"If the BBC is prepared to allow its news to be censored for the convenience of authoritarian regimes, then its value as Britain's bastion of freedom and objectivity would surely become questionable, as would its continued funding by the British taxpayers!"

Astro is the only satellite channel licensed by the federal government and is owned by tycoon Ananda Krishnan, who is said to have close links with Umno.

Sarawak Report was founded by investigative journalist Clare Rewcastle-Brown, a sister-in-law of former British prime minister Gordon Brown.