

## BBC Burma pulls Myanmar TV deal over Rohingya 'censorship'

YANGON - The BBC's Burmese language service on Monday said it was pulling a broadcasting deal with a popular Myanmar television channel citing "censorship", with insiders saying the partners had clashed over coverage of the Muslim Rohingya minority.



The announcement is a remarkable turnaround for a news organisation that famously kept Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi up to date during her long years of house arrest under junta rule.

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The announcement is the latest blow to struggling press freedoms in the country and a remarkable turnaround for a news organisation that famously kept Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi up to date during her long years of house arrest under junta rule.

Since April 2014, BBC Burmese broadcast a daily news programme on MNTV with 3.7 million daily viewers.

On Monday the BBC said it was ending the deal after MNTV censored or pulled multiple programmes since March this year.

"The BBC cannot accept interference or censorship of BBC programs by joint-venture TV broadcasters as that violates the trust between the BBC and its audience," a report the BBC's Burmese website said.

The BBC statement did not detail what content was censored and MNTV did not respond to requests for comment.

But an official at the local channel said they objected to the BBC's use of the word "Rohingya" in their reports.

"That's why we cannot broadcast their service," the employee said, asking not to be named.

The Rohingya are a stateless Muslim minority in Myanmar's western Rakhine who face severe state-sanctioned persecution and have fled in droves in recent years.

Most international media call them Rohingya because the community has long self-identified that way.

But Myanmar's government -- and most local media -- call them Bengalis, portraying them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh despite many living in the country for generations.

Hopes had been high that the new government of democracy icon Suu Kyi would usher in an era of free speech when they took power last year after half a century of military rule.

Suu Kyi was confined for years to a lakeside Yangon house under the junta but used to listen to the World Service and its Burmese language offshoot on her radio.

Yet since coming to power in landslide elections, her civilian-led government has frequently clashed with the media over their coverage.

Defamation prosecutions have also soared, increasingly targeting social media satirists, activists and journalists.

A major bone of contention with foreign media is coverage of Rakhine state, which has been under an army crackdown since a small group of Rohingya militants attacked police border posts last October.

Tens of thousands of Rohingya have fled into Bangladesh while smaller numbers of Buddhist refugees have headed in the opposite direction.

The UN believes the military's response to the militant attacks in Rakhine may amount to ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya.

Suu Kyi's government have denied reports of atrocities, refusing visas to UN officials charged with investigating the allegations.

They have frequently condemned international media coverage and blocked press access to much the war-torn region.

**Source:** AFP

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