

**'Implement free and fair media access before GE13'**  
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Free and fair access to the media for political parties must be implemented before the next general election, said Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M).

Celebrating World Press Freedom Day, the NGO said yesterday that it was "encouraged" that the recommendation to give all parties contesting in elections free and fair media access had been included in the parliamentary select committee (PSC) for electoral reform's final report.

The point was among TI-M's 22 recommendations to the prime minister and PSC last year, and was part of the PSC's report on electoral reform passed by Parliament last month, said TI-M president Paul Low.

"TI-M calls for this recommendation to be implemented immediately, and for the media to practise fair, impartial and equal coverage for all political parties, especially for the coming general election," he said.

In addition, TI-M also urged the government to repeal the Official Secrets Act, introduce a Freedom of Information Act and prohibit political party ownership of the media in order to enable the press to function.

"Efforts must be made to protect the press at all times... A free and independent media is vital in exposing malpractices and abuses by those in authority, and an important tool in fighting corruption.

"These steps will promote transparency," he added.

The PSC report was passed without debate in Parliament last month, over the objections of the committee's Pakatan Rakyat representatives.

Unhappy with the final report, they had appealed to Speaker Pandikar Amin Mulia to have their minority report appended to the PSC report but were overruled by the speaker.

World Press Freedom Day has been marred by heavy police crackdown at the recent Bersih 3.0 rally that included unprecedented harrassment of journalists.

In response, Malaysiakini held a 30-minute protest to call for an end to violence against the media.