

Bersih says airtime for manifestos not enough
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Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih 2.0) today pooh-poohed a recent government proposal to provide equal media access for party manifestos as “superficial at best”.

According to Bersih, the proposal which aims to allow all parties to air their election manifestos “does not even scratch the surface of fulfilling the demand for free and fair access to media”.

To add to these concerns, Information, Communications and Cultural Minister Rais Yatim (right) was quoted as saying the manifestos would be aired depending on their newsworthiness. This cannot be correct.

“Voters must have access to adequate information to make an informed choice during elections and the media plays a critical role in facilitating this,” it said in a statement.

It added that equal airtime does not equate to “balanced reporting” and cannot safeguard against political ownership, censorship, unfair government advantage and biases.

As such, the coalition proposes the following amendments to the Elections Act and Election Offences Act:

Compel that a right to reply be given for all allegations made.

Fair access to private media for all contesting parties and candidates, including compelling fair access to paid advertisements.

Compel state-owned media to allocate reasonably equal free airtime to contesting parties and candidates, including live televised public debates.

A code of conduct for media on election coverage

It also calls on amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 on content regulation and ownership and the repeal of the Sedition Act 1948 and Official Secrets Act 1972.

Free and equal access to media is one of Bersih's eight demands for electoral reform.