

## **Watch on watchdogs during GE13 campaign**

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**By Jonathan Yong**

A media monitoring project billed ‘Watching the Watchdog’ has been launched to encourage fair media coverage of the next general election campaign.

Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) executive officer Masjaliza Hamzah (right) told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today that this is the largest project of its kind to be undertaken by civil society.

The monitoring process will encompass the reports of 29 media organisations spanning the print, online and broadcast media, including the state-owned news agency Bernama.

The exercise will begin with the dissolution of Parliament and end three days after polling day, with about 50 trained monitors scouring daily news coverage of the election campaign.

“We also have the goal of encouraging citizens to question their news sources, gauge whether perceptions of media by the public are accurate, and to advocate media freedom protection laws,”

Masjaliza said.

Previous election monitoring projects by the CIJ had shown that mainstream media outlets were biased in favour of the BN, while the online media gave “fairer coverage”, she added.

Findings every three days

The CIJ will coordinate this project alongside the Centre for the Study of Communications and Culture and School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus (UNMC).

A team of media experts, including academics from UNMC and Universiti Sains Malaysia, will analyse the data.

Their findings will be released every three days during the monitoring period through outlets such as the press and social media.

Lead analyst Tessa Houghton, who helped to design the quantitative methodology for the project, said that a robust and independent media is crucial to any functioning democracy.

“The situation in Malaysia is far from perfect, and this research will help inform other members of civil society and push for improvements” said Houghton, who had conducted media monitoring of the New Zealand elections in 2008.

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