

Minister blames DAP for poor press ranking

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PARLIAMENT Information, Communications and Multimedia Minister Ahmad Shabery Cheek rained criticism on DAP today after one of its MPs complained about the country's poor Press Freedom Index (PFI) ranking.

During question time in Parliament, Nga Kor Ming (DAP-Taiping) criticised the government for not upholding press freedom, pointing out that Malaysia's PFI ranking by Reporters Without Borders (RWB or Reporters Sans Frontières) was at 147 out of 180 countries.

Ahmad Shabery shot back, stating that the DAP-led Penang government's action of banning Umno-owned Utusan Malaysia from its state assembly had contributed to the dismal ranking.

"Utusan is not allowed to cover the Penang state assembly. Do you see our government (BN) banning newspapers or Malaysiakini from covering here (Parliament)?"

"Penang is the one banning the media... if RWB says our press freedom is poor, it does not necessarily mean the (federal) government is responsible - the Penang government's action of banning the media also contributed to its fall," he said.

In contrast, Shabery said that under his leadership, opposition members can now air their views on RTM during the live telecast of parliamentary debates, a practice unimaginable when opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim was in the government.

Shabery then went on to question the patriotism of DAP MPs, citing the example of Chong Chieng Jen who had complained about having to sing the national anthem in cinemas during independence week.

"This shows the level of patriotism of Kuching (MP) and his party," he said.

'Ban on Utusan lifted since 2013'

However, DAP's Seremban MP Anthony Loke in a press conference at the Parliament lobby later called Shabery "irresponsible" for his accusation.

He added that the ban on Utusan Malaysia in 2011 had been lifted since 2013.

"Utusan was even allowed to cover the chief minister's press conference yesterday," he said.

Jelutong MP Jeff Ooi (right) added that the PFI ranking is largely determined by the federal

government.

"This is because only the federal government has the power to grant all the media licensing.

"As we know, media such as Malaysiakini and other party organs have also been denied publishing permits," Ooi said.

Meanwhile, Shabery told journalists at the Parliament lobby that the issue of publication permits is the Home Ministry's prerogative.

"But as for my own ministry, we do not censor any media on the Internet," he said.

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