

Amanah moots fair media coverage for polls
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 15 — Angkatan Amanah Merdeka (Amanah) wants the government to guarantee press freedom several months before any general election is held to enable equal media access to all campaigning parties.

Amanah deputy president Tan Sri Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir said today this would help those on both sides of the political divide to present their respective views to the electorate.

“Amanah suggests, at least three or four months before the polls, let the press be free.... meaning, there are free debates so that all parties can present their views.

“No country out there can truly call themselves democratic if they are controlling the media,” Abdul Kadir told a press conference at his office at the Mines Waterfront Business Park here.

He suggested that the government allow the mainstream media in particular to be less biased and print responses from all parties, rather than choosing only those that favoured the government.

He stressed that when he was minister, television regularly aired telecasts of the debates held between the government and the opposition under the programme “Forum Perdana”.

“Those debates actually worked in the government’s favour because it pulled everyone in to watch.

“Now, the government is unable to reach out to certain segments of society because people are deliberately avoiding the mainstream media,” he said.

Amanah had previously submitted a list of suggestions to the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) for electoral reforms, which included allowing Malaysians abroad the chance to vote, neutralising government offices before the elections, and stopping the distribution of money to people.

“It is a criminal act,” Abdul Kadir said, referring to the monetary handouts. “Both the giver and the receiver are committing a crime.”

The 73-year-old political veteran also repeated Amanah’s demand for the government to ensure all of the PSC’s recommendations for electoral reform are implemented before the 13th general election is called.

He said it would not be “too difficult” to do so, noting that the Election Commission (EC) has already accepted several suggestions.

Among others, Abdul Kadir referred to the suggestion to allow overseas voting for all Malaysians, which the PSC said yesterday could only be done through the often-criticised postal voting system.

Abdul Kadir said the commission could look into ways to ensure that postal ballots are better sealed and "tamper proof" in order to allay fears that votes would be manipulated.

The PSC, formed last year by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak following widespread criticism against his government's clampdown on the Bersih 2.0 rally, is expected to table its final report to Parliament on April 2.

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