

Free mainstream media, former Umno information minister urges Putrajaya
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KUALA LUMPUR, March 26 — Barisan Nasional (BN) must give the mainstream media freedom to report, at least from now until the general election, a former information minister said today.

Tan Sri Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir (picture) said Malaysia would not be able to call itself a democracy if the ruling coalition insisted on maintaining its "100 per cent" hold on mainstream media.

"Mainstream media is now 100 per cent controlled by one party — you cannot call that a democracy...", he told reporters at his office in Mines Business Park here.

"It shouldn't be 100 per cent control. At least 70-30 is all right... Maybe before you could get away with it when there was no alternative media but the situation is completely different now."

Abdul Kadir added that someone in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) media unit or the ruling coalition was targeting him, claiming there was a "pattern of stories" critical of him in the mainstream media.

"Somebody in the PMO's media unit or Umno, Barisan Nasional headquarters co-ordinates and decides who is to be condemned," the former Umno supreme council member said.

The opposition and civil society groups have urged Putrajaya to review laws they say stifle media freedom, such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) and the Official Secrets Act (OSA).

Malaysia ranked 122 in the 2011/12 World Press Freedom index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), up 19 spots from 2010.

This put the country ahead of Southeast Asian neighbours like Singapore (135), Thailand (137), the Philippines (140) and Indonesia (146).

Information, Communications and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Rais Yatim, however, cautioned that Malaysia should not be blindsided by Western standards of press freedom despite the improved ranking.

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