

EC: Airtime offer to Pakatan to be serial, not one-off
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By Md Izwan

KUALA LUMPUR, April 9 — The government's airtime offer to Pakatan Rakyat (PR) to present its election manifesto on national television was to have been part of an ongoing series and not a one-time deal, the Election Commission (EC) has said.

Its chief Tan Sri Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof said opposition leaders had misunderstood the proposed 10-minute airtime offer and rejected it before the election regulator could finalise any deal with the bloc.

"Before we could give a briefing and discuss, they already rejected," he told The Malaysian Insider in a recent interview, referring to PR leaders.

"Actually, the 10-minute offer was not for a one-off broadcast, but for a few episodes... perhaps one episode on the economic issue, a second episode on the social aspect or even others that they wished to tell people about their manifesto," he added.

Abdul Aziz (picture) said he was disappointed that PR leaders had soundly snubbed the proposed 10-minute offer without first meeting the EC.

"We have made the effort to give them mainstream media space, but they rejected... our effort all this while has been wasted.

"They should consider," he said, and repeated the offer made last month.

PR had turned down the government's 10-minute airtime offer on Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), with anchor party PKR saying it was an "insult" as the channel only screened Barisan Nasional-friendly (BN) news and advertisements at all other times.

Its ally the DAP also refused the offer, saying it did not want to give BN the justification that the ruling coalition was practising freedom of speech, while PAS said it was concerned because its manifesto presentation would not be shown live.

Abdul Aziz defended the government's decision to pre-record the manifesto presentation, saying it was necessary as the clip would be screened repeatedly and not because the authorities wanted to manipulate the broadcast as alleged by PR leaders.

Information, Communications and Culture Minister Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim said on March 22 that political parties would be given 10 minutes' airtime each on RTM to present their pre-recorded manifestos in the lead up to Election 2013.

Rais had said the opportunity was provided in respect of the democratic system of the country.

The EC will be meeting at its headquarters in Putrajaya tomorrow to set the dates for the nomination of candidates and polling in what is touted to be Malaysia's tightest electoral contest in the country's 56-year history.

A total of 222 parliamentary seats and 505 seats are up for grabs.

The PKR-PAS-DAP bloc that formed in the aftermath of the landmark Election 2008 is seen as the strongest bloc to date to topple the 13-party BN's hold on federal power.

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