

'If PM means business, election must wait'

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Electoral reform advocate Bersih 2.0 has welcomed de facto Law Minister Nazri Aziz's announcement that proposals by NGOs will be a major component of the framework for the Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on election reforms.

"We are happy to hear the news. Just the other day, Nazri did not even acknowledge that we exist. Today, at least, he acknowledged our demands. We are happy with this positive about-turn," Bersih steering committee member Wong Chin Huat said today.

Wong (left) said Bersih has since come out with more detailed paper on its earlier proposal in its memo, and that this sixth proposal actually calls for the strengthening and reform of all public institutions, not only the Election Commission (EC).

However, he said, the real point of contention was not the proposals themselves but the time frame and the manner in which they would be mulled and implemented.

"We must stress that the PSC will be pointless if there is no guarantee that reforms will be put in place before an election is called. If the prime minister means business, the election must wait," Wong stressed.

The committee was announced by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak last Thursday, as proof that his government was serious about working on electoral reforms.

While this received initial enthusiasm from civil society groups and the Opposition, many, like Wong, demanded assurances from Najib that the select committee must finish its duties and the reforms proposed must be put in place before an election is called.

However, Najib subsequently said the next general election could be held anytime and that the government was not bound by the work of the PSC on electoral reforms.

This has led to opposition parties losing their interest in the PSC, with many suspicious of Najib's real motive for the PSC, questioning if his move was just window dressing for public relations purposes instead of a concrete effort toward electoral reforms.