

## **Polls reform PSC needs to iron out 5 more issues**

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**By S Pathmawathy**

After holding an unprecedented series of public hearings nationwide and panel meetings over the past six months, the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform has agreed on 16 key issues.

However, the nine-member panel led by Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Maximus Ongkili is yet to reach consensus on five remaining issues, said a source familiar with the workings of the PSC.

The committee is in the final phase of ironing out details of its report, and plans to present its final report to Parliament on Monday, the day its deadline expires.

Some of the crucial pending matters are:

- \* political campaign funding;
- \* appropriate length of campaign period;
- \* candidates withdrawing after nomination day;
- \* voting for those residing overseas; and
- \* postal voting for media personnel.

According to the source, the committee has agreed in principle to a mechanism to allow Malaysians living overseas to vote, provided that they return home every five years.

NONE "The committee is in the process of fine-tuning the mechanism," said the source.

The PSC is also having difficulty deciding on the appropriate duration for election campaigns.

"Some members are for 21 days, while the majority prefer limiting it to 10 days," the source said.

Public funds to finance candidates?

The committee has reached agreement on establishing a mechanism to monitor political funding where contesting parties must declare their sources of finance.

azlan However, on whether political parties should be funded by the state to ensure a level-playing field, sources said BN MPs on the committee are arguing for a 'first past the post' mechanism.

Under this system, the candidate with the most votes is entitled to a significantly larger chunk of public funding.

It is understood that the Pakatan Rakyat lawmakers are for a 'proportional representation' mechanism, where funds awarded fairly reflect the proportion of support gained by each competing party.

As for granting media personnel the right to register as postal voters - a move welcomed by the Election Commission (EC) - the panel members are of two minds.

"One side is agreeable with the move because some reporters have to be able to vote early, especially if they are posted at locations far away from their polling stations.

"Others argue that they don't trust the postal voting system as it can be easily rigged."

Another issue that needs to be finalised is disallowing a candidate to withdraw his or her nomination as an election candidate.

Currently, nominees may withdraw their candidacy during the 48-hour cooling-off period and are entitled to have their hefty deposits returned.

Among others, the 16 issues which have been agreed on include allowing competing parties to have equal access to the media.

THE source said the committee will propose that the EC provides a media guideline to the relevant ministry.

The source added that the panel members were also keen on forming a special committee to oversee the 'cleaning up' of the electoral roll.

Last week, Pakatan representatives distributed copies of a study by the Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic Systems that revealed defects in the electoral database.

The study showed that there were 79,098 voters registered in 354 addresses, with at least 100 voters in each address, leading to the call for the special monitoring committee to be formed.

The EC has identified 40,025 names which are labelled as "doubtful" but said it was powerless to remove them.



