

PSC report - an illusion of polls reform
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COMMENT It is now confirmed - the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform report is a scam to hoodwink Malaysians into thinking that the Barisan Nasional (BN) government is finally restoring democratic election.

While nothing concrete has been achieved to ensure the cleansing of the "phantom" infested electoral roll and the elimination of rampant corruption and abuse of power that has become the trademark of Malaysian elections, the main stream media has painted the town red with false propaganda that the PSC report is a reform agenda that will make any democracy proud.

NONE Just look at The Star newspaper of April 4. The entire front page was splashed with goodies from the PSC, headlined 'Hooray for voters'.

Some of the prominently displayed items were: 'Allowing citizens to vote by post or at Malaysian missions', 'Creating a caretaker government after the dissolution', 'Continuous cleaning of the electoral roll', 'EC to have its own budget and be answerable to Parliament', 'EC to be restructured to enforce election laws', 'Provide allocations to political parties and candidates based on the number of seats and number of votes obtained', and 'Have a balanced delineation election constituencies'.

Wah! Isn't it wonderful. From now on, Malaysians can finally raise their heads to claim that they have a practicing democracy!

But, rejoice not. This PSC report is not a bearer of fruits but a messenger of false hopes.

The PSC report's 22 recommendations are only a series of expressions of hope that the Election Commission (EC) will do this or that.

Knowing the deeply political partisanship of EC and its unashamedly pro-BN stance to resist reform, what hope is there anything meaningful will be done to alleviate the nightmare of Malaysians of another dirty election ahead - by all counts, the worst?

There was not a word in the report on the numerous cases of fraud uncovered in the electoral roll or on the blatant open bribery and abuse of power that have gone from bad to worse from one by-election to another since the 2008 general election.

Hypocritical participation

Without acknowledging and probing the existing flaws how can there be any remedy?

There was no concrete measure proposed or firm commitment made by any quarter in the BN regime that the serious flaws that have made a mockery of our election will be rectified before the next election.

In fact, the hypocritical participation of EC in the PSC reform effort is glaringly demonstrated through the continuing cheating in the electoral roll that was going on out right during the working sessions of the PSC.

This was exposed during the press conference of Bersih 2.0 announcing its impending mass demonstration on April 28.

bersih announcing 3rd rally 040412 wong chin huat At the press conference on April 4, two academicians

with authoritative research on Malaysian elections revealed numerous cases of ongoing fraud in the electoral roll.

Wong Chin Huat (left) demonstrated four methods adopted by fraudsters to “clone” voters through variation of one or more of personal data like names, old and new identity card numbers, addresses and dates of birth.

Ong Kian Ming revealed irregularities in the postal voter roll that showed double registration and unqualified postal voters among the security personnel. These instances were described as only the “tip of the iceberg”.

From numerous previous revelations, it is now an established fact that our electoral roll is heavily infested with “phantom voters” - either through manipulation of the electoral roll or through illegal granting of citizenship to foreigners (which is particularly rampant in Sabah as proven in court).

It is therefore imperative and of utmost urgency that an independent body be commissioned to comprehensively audit both the electoral roll and the citizenship registry to flush out these “phantoms”.

But there was nothing in the PSC report to even remotely suggest that this cleansing process will proceed forthwith.

It is ironic that the PSC which is dominated by BN, instead of scrapping the notorious postal voting system as strongly demanded by reformists, has further expanded its scope.

This postal voting is a discredited system that has been profusely abused to give consistently more than 90 percent electoral support to the ruling BN.

Illegitimate advantage

Originally meant for the soldiers and police, it will now be extended to cover media workers and EC personnel, the latter, according to reports, has alarmingly increased from 140,000 to 240,000 personnel.

This decision by PSC which quickly acted upon by EC to gazette the new postal voters will no doubt add a major illegitimate advantage to BN in the coming polls.

Another major injustice that has rendered our election meaningless is BN’s stranglehold on the mass media (save the Internet), which while serving BN’s parochial political interests in ordinary times, is turned into full blast propaganda machines in election time to falsely glorify BN while running down or blacking out news of its opponents.

Electoral democracy being a game of perception, the existence of such a grotesquely lop-sided information dissemination system makes a total mockery of our democracy, not to mention putting BN’s opponents in grave disadvantage.

In recognition of reformists’ earnest requests for free and fair media coverage, PSC has, however, only given its lip service.

In recommendation No.9, PSC merely says it has “taken note” of the Information Ministry’s “readiness” to grant fair media access to all parties and candidates in the poll.

PSC further “recommends” that the EC take note of Article 115(2) of the federal constitution which stipulates that other authorities shall on request assist EC to discharge its duties as may be practicable.

If fair reporting is a serious undertaking by BN, why didn’t the ministry give a solemn pledge to honour this “readiness” instead of only the EC “taking note”?

Will this "note" taken by the EC lead to fair media coverage? Knowing the disposition of EC and BN, your guess is as good as mine.

It should be apparent by now that no real reform will come while BN is in power, for any reform - particularly electoral reform - would mean the reduction of the illegitimate advantage enjoyed by them in the contest of political power.

And the present fake reform as exemplified by the setting up of this PSC was only a grudging concession thought of by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to recover some of the electoral support lost during the ill-advised crackdown on the Bersih 2.0 rally on July 9, 2011.

From that point of view, Bersih 2.0's prompt call for another mass rally is a wise move. For only in the convincing show of strength could BN see the necessity to make some reforms, however disinclined it may feel towards them.

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