

Think-tank proposes commission to vet senators

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A special commission should be set up to thoroughly vet proposed senatorial appointments to ensure the quality of our senators, says a think-tank.

Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs founding president Tunku 'Abidin Mukhriz said this during a press conference after submitting a list of proposals to uplift the Dewan Negara to Senate president Abu Zahar Nika Unjang.

"I think what came out of the session is that the quality of the senators needs to be improved," he said.

Tunku 'Abidin, who is a member of the Negeri Sembilan royalty, argued that an independent commission was one way to change how senators are appointed and ensure only persons of quality filled the seats.

"Appointing the commission is to look at appointments of senators as well as to include a broader base of those who can be senators.

"The Dewan Negara is a place of expertise and wisdom where non-populist individuals can play a role, which is precisely why we spoke about the commission and representation."

The suggestions were well-received by Abu Zahar.

"We will look into this, thoroughly study it and we will form a committee and make a presentation. Parliament, particularly Dewan Negara, is very open and prepared to listen and engage for the improvements.

"We don't want to be a rubberstamping pad, the selection of appointees for senators must be persons of knowledge who can contribute," said the Senate president.

Direct elections for senators proposed

Tunku 'Abidin also believes that as the populist Dewan Rakyat already provides an arena for elected politicians, the senators appointed should be of higher quality, filled with professionals and academicians, to complement the political bent of the lower house.

However, contrary to his view of separating the Dewan Negara from sundry politics, the Ideas president also proposed for direct elections for senators, instead of appointments being decided by the legislative assemblies of each state.

Long seen as just be a rubber stamp for Bills passed by the Dewan Rakyat, the Dewan Negara is also considered the notorious place where politicians who fail to be elected in elections are given a backdoor into the federal cabinet.

Many parties have also accused senatorships as being given away as a boon to politically-connected individuals, rather than to experts deserving the seats.

Such impressions have led to the Dewan Negara being given only cursory attention by the citizens and largely ignored by the mass media.

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