

Progress report on electoral reform ready in fortnight

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The Election Commission (EC) will be unable to enforce some of the parliamentary select committee's (PSC) short term recommendations on electoral reform, however, it will submit a progress report before its two-week deadline.

"In the meantime we are implementing seven out of 10 recommendations in the interim report and concurrently working on the 22 recommendations in the final report one by one," said EC chairperson Abdul Aziz Mohd Yusof.

"We are doing all we can. The EC cannot afford to make mistakes," Abdul Aziz (left) told Malaysiakini, on the legal and bureaucratic challenges it faces in implementing the recommendations.

So, far the EC, among other suggestions in the interim report released in November last year, has gazetted the use of indelible ink, granted visually impaired voters the choice to select the person they want to mark their ballot papers and abolished the objections on technicalities on nomination day.

As for the 22 recommendations in the report tabled in April, the EC has set up a "permanent committee" to embark on a study of the proposals before execution.

"We are attending to the details and working under constrains to sort out everything," he stressed, adding that while working on the PSC proposals the electoral body is also gearing up for the looming general election which must be called by the mid-next year.

Among the major demands the EC is working on is granting Malaysians abroad voting privileges, he said.

However, the much sought reform has received "poor" response from those living overseas, as only a few hundreds out of more than a million have bothered to register at the Malaysian missions.

Plea for more time

The PSC had given the EC a three- month deadline from April to finalise and implement the recommendations, however, to ensure that process is glitch-free Abdul Aziz said more time is required before everything can be finalised.

Besides that the EC is also working on introducing a code of conduct to aid the caretaker government tasked with administering the country once parliament is dissolved.

"At the moment the present government will continue but they must be given a set of dos and don'ts. However, it is still being discussed with legal advisers," he said.

Some of the long-term recommendations which are also being scrutinised is political funding.

Yesterday, Rasah DAP parliamentarian Anthony Loke hit out at the EC for keeping mum on the PSC report, demanding that the commission reveal its progress.

Abdul Aziz said that his officers are now conducting nationwide training for returning officers to ensure that they are well-versed with the changes made to the election regulations over the past six months.

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