

Asli: Give election observers a chance
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By S Pathmawathy

The appointment of five non-governmental movements as election observers is not a 'public relations' move by the Election Commission (EC), protests Asian Strategy and Leadership institute (Asli) senior vice-president Ng Yeen Seen.

Besides Asli, the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas), independent pollster Merdeka Centre, Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) and the Association for the Promotion of Human Rights (Proham) have been offered to observe the looming election.

"We have had only preliminary discussions on guidelines. This is the first time we are embarking on such a project and we are willing to give it a chance," said Ng at a press conference today in Kuala Lumpur.

She reiterated that "negotiations are ongoing", when pressed on whether they agreed to the proposed restriction by the EC to impose a gag on the observers from highlighting discrepancies to the media during the general election which must be called by mid-next year.

She refrained from commenting further, only saying that: "We support the move by the EC to set up a domestic observation group."

The EC's choice of NGOs as election observers drew flak from seasoned election monitoring groups who were snubbed on grounds that they have been seen as "pro-opposition".

Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections (Mafrel) chairperson Syed Ibrahim Syed Noh had complained that these NGOs were chosen over others which specialised in the task, to create an image of "fake transparency".

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) lashed out at the decision as a "public relations" exercise and pointed out that there were too many rules that constrained the observers from functioning optimally.

Among the constraints are that the appointed election observers cannot engage with the media, their findings must go through the EC before being published and they cannot take photographs of fraud without the presiding officer's permission.

Seven key topics in debate

Meanwhile, speaking on the much-anticipated debate between political stalwarts MCA president Chua Soi Lek and DAP secretary-general and Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng on Sunday, Ng said that the research institute were confident it would go well.

The debate, "DAP vs MCA: Whose policies benefit the country more?" at the Sunway Pyramid Convention Centre from 2.30pm to 4.30pm, will zone in on seven key topics - education, healthcare, economic prosperity, community service, national unity, public welfare and poverty alleviation.

The first debate between the two leaders was held in February in Mandarin on the topic "Is

the two-party system becoming a two-race system?"

It was telecast live on Astro AEC and a simultaneous Bahasa Malaysia translation was aired over Astro Awani.

This time the debate will be telecast at 11pm to reach out to a bigger audience.

"This will enable more people to see it as they'll be at home at night. The telecast will have subtitles in Mandarin and Bahasa Malaysia," said Ng.

She also added that Sundays were often a "family day" while others often engaged in sports in the afternoon.

She denied that the delay in the telecast would allow censorship as Asli officers would be uploading their recordings on YouTube as well.

"In this day and age I don't think it is possible to censor anything. There will be participants recording uploading to Facebook or Twitter," she exclaimed.

The debate will be moderated by Asli's chief executive officer Michael Yeo, with Housing and Local Government Minister and MCA vice-president Chor Chee Heung, DAP party organ Rocketkini's chief editor Wan Hamidi Hamid and Monash University's School of Social Sciences head James Chin, who is representing Asli, as panellists.

According to Ng, 500 tickets have been sold to the public at RM88 each, while 800 tickets were allocated for MCA and DAP respectively.

Aside from questions thrown by the moderator and panellists, the public will can pose questions on cards which will be randomly drawn by the debaters and the moderators.

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