

'PM's EC panel will be useless if BN-dominated'

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's bid to restore the Election Commission's credibility with a bipartisan oversight committee may come to nothing if it is yet again BN-dominated, says former Malaysians for Free and Fair Elections (Mafrel) chairperson Abdul Malek Hussein.

The best example of this will be the parliamentary select committee on electoral reform (PSC) formed in 2011 and dominated by five BN MPs, a BN-friendly independent and three opposition MPs, Malek said.

abdul malek hussin mafrel interview 140806 look "We had this experience before. After the PSC came out with 22 recommendations to the government and the Election Commission, nothing came out of it in the end.

"This happened because the majority of PSC members were in favour of the ruling coalition," Malek (left) told Malaysiakini when contacted.

He is pessimistic about Najib's pledge, based on this experience, but said there could be hope if the government was willing to allow the panel to be led by the opposition leader.

"After all, the move is in response to the massive public outcry as well as the opposition outcry (about fraud in last month's general election)," he said.

Pakatan Rakyat has demanded the resignation of EC chief Abdul Aziz Yusof and his deputy Wan Ahmad Wan Omar for alleged fraud in the May 5 general election and the EC's blunder over the implementation of indelible ink on voters.

The EC has also been blamed for assisting the ruling coalition in gerrymandering, resulting in Pakatan winning almost 52 percent of the popular vote but only capturing 40 percent of the seats in Parliament.

The BN only won 47 percent of the popular vote but bagged 60 percent of the seats.

Another safeguard, Malek said, would be to make the EC constitutionally answerable to Parliament.

Putting the EC under the special committee would likely see the panel only submitting recommendations, which would be subjected to the BN-dominated voice.

'Opposition must head some of the committees'

Echoing Malek's position was Seremban MP Anthony Loke, a former member of the 2011 PSC on electoral reform. Loke said Commonwealth tradition was for important committees such as the Public Accounts Committee to be led by the opposition.

"If you respect the principle of check-and-balance, then some of these committees must be led by opposition MPs," Loke told Malaysiakini when contacted.

He said the PSC on electoral reform then had recommended a permanent committee on electoral reform but it did not touch on any oversight of the commission.

NONEThe EC falls under the Prime Minister's Department.

While agreeing that the EC should be independent, Loke said that there was nothing wrong about placing the EC under Parliament.

"We are not saying that once we have a PSC, you override the function and power of the EC. Rather, it is just to oversee and ensure that the EC's actions are accountable to Parliament," he added.

Meanwhile, NGO WargaAman echoed Bersih's call for the EC chief and its deputy to be replaced with individuals who truly enjoyed public confidence, instead of an oversight committee.

Replace the two top EC heads with independent professionals as well as NGO representatives, such as Bersih co-chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan, who could even be the commission's chairperson," WargaAman secretary-general S Barathidasan (above) said.

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