

First Shocker Of Parliamentary Select Committee On Electoral Reforms
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My first reaction yesterday to the announcement by the Prime Minister, Najib Razak of a parliamentary select committee on electoral reforms is to welcome the proposal as it is a vindication of the 709 Bersih rally for free and fair elections – provided it is a genuine and sincere attempt to clean up the various defects and flaws in the electoral system.

However, the first shocker of the PSC on electoral reforms is the report that the Parliamentary Select Committee would have its first meeting tomorrow to discuss "everything that needs to be done" and reach a consensus on the matter.

How can this be when the Parliamentary Select Committee has not yet been formed and the respective Pakatan Rakyat parties have not been consulted and their agreement sought with regard to the PSC's terms of reference and its membership?

A Parliamentary Select Committee can only be formed by Parliament, which is not in session and will only convene on October 3 for the start of the 2012 budget meeting.

In view of the importance and urgency of the matter, an emergency meeting of Parliament is fully justified. Will the Prime Minister convene an emergency meeting of Parliament to approve the establishment of the Parliamentary Select Committee on electoral reforms?

The Barisan Nasional government should not act unilaterally and arbitrarily in the establishment of the PSC on electoral reforms but must fully consult and secure the agreement of the respective PR parties on important matters like the terms of reference, scope of review, time-frame and membership of the PSC.

Bersih 2.0 should be fully involved in the PSC review and recommendations for electoral reforms.

There should be firm undertaking by the Prime Minister of full co-operation by the Elections Commission and all relevant departments with the Parliamentary Select Committee and that there would be no sabotage or subterfuge of any kind by any government department using "official secrets", "national security" or other excuses to stone-wall requests for information.

This was what happened to the previous Parliamentary Select Committee on Integrity which was formed in the previous Parliament. Although the then Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawai agreed with its formation, the Select Committee which was chaired by a Minister, Bernard Dompok met hostile reception from government departments when they were asked "sensitive" information, resulting in the resignation of the Chairman and the Select Committee producing no report when Parliament was dissolved in February 2008.

This time, Najib must give categorical assurance that the report and recommendations of the Parliamentary Select Committee on electoral reforms would be completed, made public and implemented by the government and Parliament.

Most important of all, Najib must also give the categorical assurance that the electoral reforms proposed by the Parliamentary Select Committee would be implemented in time for the next general elections.

The bona fide and credibility of the proposal for a Parliamentary Select Committee on electoral reforms would be thrown immediately into question if the PSC is formed unilaterally and arbitrarily without full consultation and agreement of the respective PR parties and if the various assurances that it would be a serious exercise are not forthcoming.

LIM KIT SIANG

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