

Pakatan asks BN to jointly fix polls date
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 13 — The federal opposition has called for the Barisan Nasional (BN) government to negotiate and fix the date of the next general election together to avoid any dispute over the implementation of electoral reforms that Datuk Seri Najib Razak has promised.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers said today that as Putrajaya has set aside six months for a parliamentary select committee to table recommendations to the House, the government should allow enough time for the reforms to take place before federal polls are called.

“It will show their commitment to electoral reforms. It has never happened before but we can make history and avoid any dissatisfaction,” said PAS vice-president Salahuddin Ayub (picture).

The prime minister had announced last month that a polls reform panel would be set up, six weeks after tens of thousands poured into the capital in the July 9 Bersih rally to support free and fair elections.

However, he has said that reforms can be implemented as and when his administration saw fit.

Salahuddin noted that the current Parliament need not be dissolved until April 2013, “so there is no need to rush into things.”

“We have time. Even if we want to amend the constitution to implement reforms, we give our sincere assurance that we will support it. But if there is no assurance from them, then it is just window dressing and Bersih 3 will take place. Don’t forget this,” the Kubang Kerian MP said.

PR set out today four other demands to guarantee the opposition pact’s full support to the committee, including implementing Bersih’s eight-point demand, reasonable time for the panel to discuss suggestions, inserting the issue of citizenship to foreigners as one of the terms of reference and that all recommendations tabled must be fulfilled.

But Salahuddin refused to say if PR would boycott the committee if all five demands were not met.

“We will see how the federal government will respond to this and then negotiate,” he said.

PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar and DAP Youth chief Anthony Loke also represented their parties in demanding an assurance from Najib that the committee’s findings would be fully implemented before Parliament is dissolved.

“If it is dissolved, then the select committee will also be dissolved automatically and rendered invalid. This will mean that the select committee is just a political ploy to pull wool

over the eyes of the public and repair Najib's image after the Bersih rally," said Loke, who is Rasah MP.

The international media had widely criticised the Najib administration's clampdown on the July 9 rally which saw water cannons and tear gas fired on demonstrators by police who also arrested nearly 2,000 leading up to and during the march.

PAS's Tumpat MP Datuk Kamaruddin Jaafar also stressed that the issue of foreigners being given voting rights must be addressed before polls are called.

"If we are so proud that we are no longer colonised, then we should not be colonised by foreign voters in this coming election," the Islamist party's former secretary-general said, referring to the ongoing debate over the contribution of communist leaders to Malaysia's independence effort.

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