

Bersih wants thorough polls reform, panel recommendations made public

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 16 — Bersih 2.0 has welcomed the Najib administration's move to form a parliamentary select committee to examine the current electoral system, but stated that the panel's final recommendations should be made available to the public.

Bersih chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan stressed the election watchdog's eight demands for electoral reform should be taken into account, and that NGOs as well the public should be involved in the entire process.

"Yes, we certainly welcome this move. It is without doubt a step in the right direction and is a positive response to the aspirations of the rakyat.

"We hope NGOs will be involved in the process and that our eight demands will receive attention before the 13th general election," said Ambiga in a text message to The Malaysian Insider.

"We are ready to assist," said the former Bar Council chairman.

Bersih steering committee member Maria Chin Abdullah said the select committee's final recommendations should include feedback and views from the public.

Maria told The Malaysian Insider last night the government should poll views of Malaysians in the country before deciding on the said recommendations into the current electoral system.

"Bersih welcomes the parliamentary select committee but we want full transparency in the process.

"There should be public consultation, and it should be included in the final recommendations. The finalised report of the select committee should also be made available to the public," she said.

Maria said Bersih will give the parliamentary panel three months to "meet, discuss, and finalise" its report on electoral reform recommendations.

"We also want the government's assurance that it will implement the reforms, and see it through," said the political activist.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's latest announcement is a major concession that acknowledges the political fallout from his administration's harsh clampdown on the rally.

His administration was roundly criticised in the international media, with his reformist image taking a major hit after the authorities took extreme measures including firing tear gas and water cannons at largely peaceful demonstrators.

The prime minister said the committee will include lawmakers from both Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat.

The committee, according to the PM, would ensure that there were no further accusations of electoral roll "manipulations."

Bersih took to the streets in the capital city on July 9 to demand for fair and free elections, defying warnings of police action, which finally resulted in nearly 1,700 arrests, scores injured and one ex-soldier dead.

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