

Nazri adamant that BN chairs polls reforms panel
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 19 — A Barisan Nasional (BN) minister will chair the electoral reforms parliamentary select committee despite Pakatan Rakyat's (PR) insistence to lead it, Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz has declared, saying "no means no".

The minister in the Prime Minister's Department asked the opposition for "one good reason" why one of its representatives should hold the post, pointing out that only federal ministers could provide ease of access to all government amenities.

"As with all previous committees, a minister always chairs it so that it (the committee) can enjoy all the government facilities... calling for meetings, using passes. Plus, the minister commands the respect of all the MPs," he told The Malaysian Insider.

Nazri (picture), who is the minister in charge of parliamentary affairs, agreed however that the practice was according to convention and was not a House rule.

"But this is the reality in this country. But my question is — why do they want to be chairman? What is so special about this committee? Every time we form committees and every committee is special, so why is this one extra special?" he added.

The Umno minister reiterated that the committee will comprise nine members — five from BN, including a minister as chairman, one from each of PR's three parties and one independent representative.

"In previous committees, it is usually seven members... four from BN and one from each PR party. But that was before we had independent members in the House. Now, to acknowledge the independents, we increase the members to nine," he said.

Asked if this meant that PR's request to chair the committee would be turned down, Nazri repeated: "Give me one good reason why it should be otherwise."

When pressed again for an answer, the minister said: "Well, knowing Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Aziz, no means no. So, no. No means no."

PR had earlier requested to chair the committee, which was announced earlier this week by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, saying this would prove the administration's sincerity to introduce electoral reforms.

"To prove good faith, we request the prime minister to incorporate the following demands (that) the head of the parliamentary committee should be from the opposition," said the release sent by the coalition's secretariat on Tuesday.

The opposition pact's leaders have grown suspicious of Najib's celebrated announcement to study reforms, particularly after the prime minister said on Wednesday the polls review panel was formed merely to "satisfy" the opposition.

PR and election watchdog group Bersih 2.0 have been pushing for electoral reforms for years, resulting in two chaotic street rallies — the first in 2007, which has been largely

credited for the Election 2008 tsunami, and the second on July 9 this year, which saw the Najib administration's reformist image take a severe beating in the international media.

Speaking on the matter yesterday, Dewan Rakyat Deputy Speaker Datuk Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar also said it was normal that any select committee mooted by the government to have a majority of BN lawmakers.

He said this was consistent with most parliaments globally, including the United Kingdom, when issues affected public interest, Bernama Online reported.

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