

Bersih: Electoral reforms pointless if polls held first
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By Boo Su-Lyn

Bersih said not linking the reforms committee outcome to the general election "defeats the purpose and spirit of setting up the PSC".

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 20 — Bersih 2.0 is insisting that the next general election should only be called after the parliamentary select committee's (PSC) recommendations on electoral reforms are implemented, saying today anything earlier would make the panel "pointless".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday that federal polls could be held anytime and would not depend on the proceedings of the panel that will be formed in October.

"This totally defeats the purpose and spirit of setting up the PSC as it is meant to resolve serious fraudulent practices in the electoral processes," said Bersih 2.0 in a statement issued by its steering committee today.

"The PSC would be pointless if Parliament is dissolved before the committee presents its report to Parliament," the electoral reform movement added.

Najib, however, also said that despite the fact that the panel will also be dissolved along with Parliament before general elections, whatever reforms that could be carried out before that would be executed first.

The Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman announced the panel last Monday in what was a major concession to Bersih 2.0, whose July 9 rally was met with stern police action before and during the march, resulting in nearly 1,700 arrests on the day of the march.

But Dewan Rakyat Deputy Speaker Datuk Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar has said that the electoral panel would take a year to conclude discussions.

Najib, who must call a general election by early 2013, has delayed Umno polls that were due in April this year, but the party's constitution states that they can only be delayed by 18 months, which coincides with October next year, exactly when Wan Junaidi believes the committee will begin wrapping up.

With speculation that Najib will call snap election soon, Wan Junaidi's comments could mean that the parliamentary panel would not be able to present its findings as the Umno president would likely dissolve Parliament ahead of potentially fractious party polls.

Bersih 2.0 also stressed today that the select committee should be chaired by a federal opposition lawmaker.

"The function of the PSC is to cross-examine the electoral system as administered by the government of the day... the Cabinet's decision to appoint a Cabinet minister to chair the Committee is an indication that the Cabinet fails to understand the principle of separation of powers," said the group.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz said yesterday

that the practice was according to convention, and was not a House rule.

He also reiterated that the panel will comprise nine members — five from BN, including a minister as chairman, one from each of Pakatan Rakyat (PR)'s three parties and one independent representative.

Bersih 2.0 insisted that federal polls must be delayed until after the implementation of reforms such as a clean-up of the electoral roll, the use of indelible ink, automatic voter registrations, reform of the postal vote system, and a minimum 21-day campaign period.

The electoral reforms group called on the select committee to engage experts, release its final reports to the public before presenting them to the Cabinet and Parliament, and conduct nationwide public hearings.

"The PSC should (also) be given leave to sit while Parliament is in session... Bersih 2.0 maintains our call for the formation of a Royal Commission of Inquiry on electoral reforms to study the larger issues of elections and democracy such as electoral system, a full review of all electoral laws and the membership of the Election Commission," it said.

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