

Kit Siang: PM broke tacit promise to hold polls after reforms

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By Boo Su-Lyn

Lim also accused Najib of reneging on his implicit undertaking last Monday that federal polls would not be held until the panel reached a consensus on electoral improvements. — file pic
KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 20 — Lim Kit Siang is questioning the clout of the parliamentary select committee (PSC) on electoral reform after Datuk Seri Najib Razak said yesterday that the timing of general elections would not depend on the panel's proceedings.

Lim also accused the prime minister of reneging on his implicit undertaking last Monday — when announcing the panel — that federal polls would not be held until the panel reached a consensus on electoral improvements.

"In just four days, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has done a full flip-flop," said Lim in a statement today.

The Ipoh Timur MP cited a report from national news agency Bernama on Najib's remarks last Monday that quoted the PM as saying: "This is so that we can reach a consensus in facing the next election without any suspicion about any manipulation by the government."

"In declaring that the next general election can be held anytime and is not bound by the work of the parliamentary select committee on electoral reform, Najib is in effect saying that the Barisan Nasional (BN) government is now prepared to go ahead with the next general election, although it has failed to put to rest suspicions of manipulation by the government in the country's electoral process," said Lim.

Najib formed the panel some five weeks after electoral reform movement Bersih 2.0 took to the streets of KL to call for free and fair elections. — file pic

"This has vindicated the intense questioning and doubts about the true intentions of the parliamentary select committee proposal, whether it is a genuine and sincere attempt to address and resolve the many flaws in the electoral system or just a gimmick to sidetrack legitimate and growing public demands for electoral reform," added the veteran politician.

Lim also pointed out that Pakatan Rakyat (PR) was not consulted on the panel's formation, membership, terms of reference and timeline. PR said last Wednesday that it may boycott the select committee if the panel did not meet its expectations.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Aziz said yesterday that a BN minister will chair the panel despite PR's insistence on helming it.

He said 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.

The Umno minister added that the practice was according to convention and was not a House rule. Lim questioned today if Najib's "flip-flop" was caused by "hardline pressures", naming Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

Muhyiddin insisted last Tuesday that the current electoral system was fair and transparent and only needed some tweaking.

"Be that as it may, it is now in the court of the prime minister as to whether his proposal of a parliamentary select committee will be stillborn because of his refusal to fully consult with and seek the agreement of Pakatan Rakyat on various important aspects of the committee, as well to assure all Malaysians that it will be a meaningful exercise and not a political ploy to avoid electoral reform," said Lim.

Najib formed the panel some five weeks after electoral reform movement Bersih 2.0 took to the streets of the capital city to call for free and fair elections. Police locked down the city but nearly 50,000 people still turned up.

A similar rally in November 2007 was credited for BN's poor showing in national polls held in March 2008, where the ruling coalition lost its customary two-thirds parliamentary majority and four more states.

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