

Pakatan agrees to join electoral reform panel
The Malaysian Insider
September 21, 2011
By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 21 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) has formally accepted Putrajaya's invitation to join the parliamentary select committee (PSC) for electoral reform to be formed when the Dewan Rakyat sits next month.

PR de facto leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim told a press conference this evening that the pact was willing to "walk the last mile" and cooperate with Barisan Nasional (BN) for the sake of reforming the country's election process.

"We have discussed it and we will give a full mandate to our representatives to state our position and observe the workings of the committee," he said after chairing the PR leadership council meeting at PAS's headquarters on Jalan Raja Laut here this evening.

He reiterated fears that the committee would be dissolved along with Parliament to make way for coming polls even before its recommendations are implemented but said PR would keep an open mind and not be "presumptuous".

"Whether the PSC is just a delay tactic or it is serious, we will give them a chance," he said.

Anwar said the leadership had yet to determine the names of the three MPs who would represent PR in the PSC but would do so very soon, before Parliament sits on October 3.

The representatives, he said, would be tasked with presenting the key demands of election watchdog Bersih 2.0 as well as PR's requests for electoral reforms to the PSC.

The federal opposition had earlier mulled boycotting the panel mooted by Datuk Seri Najib Razak, expressing doubt over Putrajaya's sincerity to reform the election process.

DAP parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang had also said Najib's admission that forming the panel was merely to "satisfy the opposition" only raised further doubts over the credibility of the committee, which will see Barisan Nasional (BN) MPs making up five of its nine members.

The prime minister raised eyebrows when he announced the formation of the PSC, a key demand in electoral reform movement Bersih 2.0's agenda.

Najib and his administration's reformist image took a beating in the international media after the authorities embarked on a widespread clampdown before and during the July 9 Bersih rally, resulting in nearly 1,700 arrests and the use of water cannon and tear gas to break up a largely peaceful protest.

With his sudden decision to introduce reforms, sources in the prime minister's camp say that Najib now realises the folly of a sledgehammer approach — one which has tarnished his aim of being seen as a moderate and a reformer, and has cost him the support of middle Malaysia.

Lim, however, reminded Najib today that PR would not be party to the panel if it fails to implement electoral reforms in time for the coming polls, speculated to take place by next year.

Anwar agreed, saying PR would not compromise on its stand and was merely participating in the panel out of respect for the prime minister's promise that the election process would be cleaned up.

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