

Bersih demands to be framework for polls reform panel

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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 22 — The parliamentary select committee to improve elections will base its framework on Bersih 2.0's eight-point demands.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz told reporters today that this was agreed upon after he met with representatives from the Dewan Rakyat, Attorney-General's Chambers and both the chairman and deputy chairman of the Election Commission (EC).

"We have agreed [on] what has been suggested by memo from the NGOs," the minister in charge of Parliament said, referring to the Bersih coalition of 62 NGOs, which was earlier outlawed by the government.

Although he refused to mention Bersih by name, he acknowledged when asked if he was referring to the "legal NGOs" who formed the electoral reforms movement.

"There is no point having a select committee if we don't look into all these. We don't want, as they (opposition parties) claim, to be window dressing. We will look into these from the point of view of prevention," he said.

He also said that it was agreed that the panel would meet for six months and he would bring a motion to form the panel on October 3, the first day of the next sitting, subject to Cabinet approval.

The Padang Rengas MP added that the EC would now submit a memorandum on these recommendations in time for the Cabinet to discuss it in a meeting scheduled for September 7.

The six-month timeframe would allow the select committee to submit its findings a year before Datuk Seri Najib Razak's mandate expires in April 2013.

Crucially, it also gives the Umno president a six-month window before potentially fractious Umno party polls, already delayed from April this year, must be held.

The prime minister made a major concession to Bersih when he announced the electoral reforms panel last week.

It came some five weeks after tens of thousands poured into the capital on July 9 to support Bersih 2.0s call for free and fair elections.

During that time, he came under heavy fire from international media who criticised his administration's handling of the rally, where nearly 1,700 were arrested, scores injured and one ex-soldier died.

According to Nazri, the committee will look into the eight points as below:

1. Cleaning up the electoral roll

2. Reforming postal or advance voting
3. Use of indelible ink versus the EC's proposal of a biometric system
4. Extending the campaign period to 21 days
5. Free and fair access to media
6. Strengthening the credibility of the EC
7. Ending vote-buying
8. Ending dirty politics

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