

## **Suhakam hopes more time to discuss poll reforms**

**Bernama**

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KUALA LUMPUR: The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) said Thursday, Aug 18 it hoped that the proposed parliamentary select committee on electoral reform would be given ample time to discuss the many concerns expressed by various groups on the matter.

In welcoming the prime minister's announcement on the formation of the committee, Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Hasmy Agam said Suhakam, in its 2007 annual report, had put forth recommendations with regard to free and fair elections. These included giving equal access to the media, a longer election campaign period and automatic registration of all eligible voters, he said.

He also reiterated Suhakam's call for a review of existing laws relating to the media that restricted freedom of expression, particularly the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984.

"In upholding transparency and accountability and ensuring checks and balances, the commission has recommended a self-regulatory media council that will not only ensure press freedom but also ensure ethical and responsible journalism," he said.

He also urged the government to consider forming another select committee to look into human rights matters as an additional measure in upholding the rights of the people, thereby improving the system of parliamentary democracy in the country.

Meanwhile, in another statement, Suhakam refuted claims that it had been biased in dealing with the sodomy case of Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim following an application filed by Mohd Saiful Bukhari's father Azlan Mohd Lazim for the commission "to look into the possibility of the hearing involving Mohd Saiful being postponed".

Suhakam secretary Hashimah Nik Jaafar said that though the functions and powers of the commission were to investigate any complaint relating to alleged human rights violations, the functions and powers of the commission were subject to the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia Act 1999.

"The third part of Section 12 (12) (a) of Act 597 states clearly that the commission shall not investigate complaints which are the subject of any proceedings pending in any court, including any appeal," she said.

However, the commission had informed the chief justice to look into the case and to take appropriate action and would continue to monitor the progress of the case, she added. She also said that the commission meeting on Aug 16 examined and discussed in detail the letter submitted by Azlan Mohd Lazim.

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