

Polls reform panel chief cannot block Bersih reps, says Pakatan
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 6 — Opposition representatives in the parliamentary select committee on electoral reforms have accused the panel's chairman of making unilateral decisions on behalf of the nine-man team.

PAS election head Hatta Ramli said that Datuk Seri Maximus Ongkili had no right to decide on his own that the outlawed Bersih movement would not be allowed to submit proposals to the committee and that there would only be six public hearings held.

"Is it a one-man show or a nine-man committee? He is only the chairman, not a minister who can order around his officials," the Kuala Krai MP told a press conference today.

Ongkili had said yesterday that only "legally registered" groups would be allowed to table their proposals.

The science, technology and innovation minister said that Bersih chief Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan could only come forward as an individual but not to represent the electoral reform movement that organised the July 9 rally calling for free and fair elections.

The Kota Marudu MP also said the committee will hold at least six hearings to seek public feedback, particularly on "contentious issues" regarding the election process.

But DAP Youth chief Anthony Loke said today that as the panel would only hold its first meeting on Wednesday, Ongkili should not decide things in advance and treat the committee as a "rubber-stamping" body.

"I want to remind him that it is a bipartisan committee, meaning that decisions must be made together," the Rasah MP said.

Hatta also added that Ongkili should clarify who he meant by Bersih as "everyone who attended" the rally was a member of the movement.

"Then we too cannot be part of the committee," he said, referring to Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers who had strongly backed the coalition of 62 NGOs.

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 over 1,500 arrests and the use of water cannons 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 reformer, and has cost him the support of middle Malaysia.

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