

Prove reviews not a delay tactic, Pakatan tells Najib

The Malaysian Insider

August 16, 2011

By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 16 — Pakatan Rakyat (PR) is insisting that electoral reforms must happen before the next general election after Datuk Seri Najib Razak's move last night to form a parliamentary select committee to review the electoral system and relook censorship.

The federal opposition insisted that these efforts would only be a "diversion" if demands highlighted by electoral reform movement Bersih were not implemented.

"The committee must also take input from Bersih and if reforms do not take place before the general election, then Najib is not sincere," said PAS deputy president Mohamad Sabu, who had mobilised his party for the July 9 rally in the capital.

The prime minister's announcement yesterday was "an admission" of the political fallout from his administration's clampdown on tens of thousands who took to the streets calling for free and fair elections, DAP strategist Liew Chin Tong said.

The Bukit Bendera MP told The Malaysian Insider that Najib had taken "the first steps towards a healthy democracy" that should also include a free media and the right to assembly.

"The government must adopt the recommendations made by the select committee or it will be seen as just delay tactics," he said.

The Barisan Nasional (BN) government was roundly criticised in the international media, with Najib's reformist image taking a beating after the authorities took extreme measures including firing tear gas and water cannons at largely peaceful demonstrators.

His administration was further ridiculed for censoring an article on the July 9 rally by influential British weekly The Economist, which Najib yesterday admitted had brought more negative publicity for the government.

"I've decided the old ways of censorship needs to be studied. Censorship is no longer effective and should be reviewed," the prime minister had said.

Najib's concessions also suggest that he was forced to give space to Bersih and its iconic leader Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan as the government has been floundering since last month's rally.

But PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar said "we've already identified ailments afflicting our electoral system," referring to various allegations of vote-rigging including recent claims that 1,600 foreigners have been given the right to vote.

"It's time to act on the prescriptions suggested by Bersih or I fear this select committee will be a diversionary tactic.

"As for censorship, talk is cheap. Do away with the Printing Presses and Publications Act already," the Lembah Pantai MP told The Malaysian Insider, citing the law that requires all

publications to renew an annual licence issued by the Information Ministry.

Bersih took to the streets July 9 in defiance of warnings of police action, which finally resulted in nearly 1,700 arrests, scores injured and one ex-soldier dead.

The government crackdown led to international criticism and a group of Malaysians even protested when Najib visited London, a rare experience for any Malaysian prime minister abroad.

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