

Najib must ensure reforms before polls, says Bersih
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By Shannon Teoh

PETALING JAYA, Sept 23 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak must guarantee that electoral reforms are implemented before he calls a general election, Bersih said today.

The electoral reform movement said that although the prime minister had promised a parliamentary select committee (PSC) to improve the electoral system, the panel's recommendations must include its eight-point demands and be executed before polls are held.

"If not, it will be nothing more than a public relations exercise," steering committee member Subramaniam Pillay said of Najib's panel.

Najib had announced the bipartisan committee more than a month after widespread condemnation in the international media over his administration's clampdown on the July 9 Bersih rally for free and fair elections.

Police dispersed tens of thousands of demonstrators with tear gas and water cannons, resulting in chaotic scenes which saw nearly 1,700 arrested, scores injured and the death of an ex-soldier.

But Najib later said that the timing of elections will not be tied to the PSC, prompting critics to question his commitment to electoral reforms.

Maria Chin Abdullah, also a Bersih steering committee member, said today that the government cannot use time as an excuse not to implement reforms as its eight demands "do not even need a select committee to implement."

"These steps can be implemented by the Election Commission without any change in the law," she said at a press conference this morning.

Bersih's demands are to clean up the electoral roll, reform postal voting, use indelible ink, allow free and fair access to the media, extend the campaign period to 21 days, strengthen public institutions and to stop corruption and dirty politics.

Subramaniam, who is also an executive committee member of human rights NGO Aliran, added that the select committee meetings should be made open to the public and the press to ensure transparency and accountability.

"Then the public and civil society can also give its views," he said.

Bersih held the press conference this morning to announce that it will launch a "Implement the 8 Demands Before GE-13" campaign on September 30 to "remind the government that the 13th general election must not be held until the bare minimum of free and fair election is met."

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