

Najib must guarantee reforms before polls, says Pakatan
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By Shannon Teoh

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 24 — The federal opposition has demanded a guarantee from Datuk Seri Najib Razak that the Election Commission (EC) will carry out electoral reforms before a general election is called.

Pakatan Rakyat (PR) said today that the prime minister's insistence that the timing of polls was not bound to a parliamentary select committee on electoral improvements raised doubts over whether "he means business."

However, with just six weeks to go before the polls panel is to be formed by Dewan Rakyat, the opposition pact said it has not decided if a failure to offer such an assurance will see PR decline to join what Barisan Nasional (BN) hopes will be a bipartisan committee.

"There is no decision to boycott but we have made it abundantly clear that the onus is on the government to show good faith.

"The EC must take immediate action and there must be an assurance from the prime minister that he means business ... that elections will only be held after the EC has taken measures recommended by the select committee," Opposition leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim told reporters after a PR leadership meeting.

Najib made a major concession to Bersih when he announced the electoral reform panel some five weeks after tens of thousands poured into the capital on July 9 to support Bersih 2.0's 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.

But widely expected to call a general election ahead of BN's mandate expiring on April 28, 2013, Najib said last week that the timing of polls would not be bound to the select committee which will sit for six months.

Anwar added today that not only must the panel submit its recommendations but the EC must also implement them before Parliament is dissolved.

PAS deputy president Mohamad Sabu also said that the EC should begin immediate reforms, as some of Bersih's eight-point demands did not need to be discussed by lawmakers, such as the use of indelible ink to prevent multiple voting, an extension of the campaign period and the cleaning up the electoral roll.

DAP parliamentary leader Lim Kit Siang also cautioned BN not to use the select committee "as an excuse for non-action" or "a formula for delaying tactics."

The opposition coalition further demanded a Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) to look into its claim that "hundreds of thousands" of foreigners have been given citizenship and the right to vote.

"We have asked the home minister to act immediately and clarify on a national security issue of instant citizenships being given to hundreds of thousands of foreigners.

"The Pakatan Rakyat committee of MPs demands an RCI on citizenship," PKR de facto leader Anwar said.

The opposition has repeatedly claimed to have proof of at least 1,600 permanent residents being given citizenships and subsequently, added to the electoral roll.

It had demanded an emergency sitting of Parliament to debate the issue before Najib announced the select committee on electoral reform.

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