

Cabinet decides on a nine-man Electoral Reform Committee (Update)

Bernama

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By Pauline Wong

KUALA LUMPUR (Aug 17, 2011):The electoral reform select committee will comprise nine members of Parliament -- five from Barisan Nasional, three from the Opposition and an independent. It will be chaired by a cabinet minister.

"The respective parties will choose their own representatives to the committee," Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz (pix) told a press conference today to announce the cabinet decision.

"The framework of this committee will be discussed with the Election Commission (EC), and the proposal will be laid out in a memorandum. Once the memorandum is accepted, the motion to form the select committee will be tabled in Parliament, hopefully on Oct 3," he said.

Nazri said the cabinet hoped the committee will be able to table its suggestions, and better yet, make policy changes and amendments to the law by the meeting of parliament in March 2012.

He said the scope of discussion will be up to the select committee, but the cabinet hoped that it will include biometrics, indelible ink, campaigning methods, advanced voting for those who can't vote on the actual date and whether to allow registered voters who are overseas to vote.

He said the committee, which was announced by the prime minister on Monday night, would hold public hearings and roadshows to gather feedback and suggestions.

The committee's role is to strengthen existing election regulations, said Nazri, stressing that it was being formed because the government also wanted to see free and fair elections.

"It does not mean the election laws are flawed. What we want to do is strengthen them and also to discuss the concerns raised by some quarters that the current laws are inadequate," said Nazri who is de facto law minister.

Asked if reforms proposed by the committee will be implemented before the next general election, he replied: "I don't know when the elections will be, but since this Parliament expires in 2013, I expect the committee to come up with its report well before then."

As to whether the committee will consider proposals made by the Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) and the Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih), he said all suggestions were welcome.

However, pressed on whether the select committee will take into consideration Bersih's demands, Nazri refused to acknowledge Bersih which the government had declared illegal a few days before the NGO organised a mammoth street demonstration on July 9 to press for electoral reform.

"I don't know who Bersih is. I also want to know. Bersih is not a registered body," said Nazri, and asked reporters to name individuals instead.

He then suggested that these individuals make their suggestions to the committee during the public hearing as "there is nothing special about them and it is not for them to tell us what to do".

Bersih had on Tuesday, in response to the prime minister's announcement on setting up a polls reform panel, recommended that it submit two reports --- one outlining immediate reforms on issues such as vote buying, cleaning up of electoral rolls and postal voting within three months, and another outlining long-term reforms such as review of electoral laws and re-delineation exercise, within two years.

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