

MACC revamp doesn't need two-thirds parliamentary majority, says Pakatan, Bar chief

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 28 — The ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) does not need to win two-thirds control of Parliament to improve the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) as such plans would not necessarily be opposed by Pakatan Rakyat (PR), say its lawmakers.

Opposition lawmakers told The Malaysian Insider that any steps to improve the efficiency and accountability of the anti-graft body should be welcomed, and that they will be open to debating the matter in Parliament at its next sitting.

Bar Council president Lim Chee Wee said there should be no reason why MPs "across the floor" would not vote in favour of amendments to the Federal Constitution if it was done in the interest of the nation.

They were responding to Datuk Seri Najib Razak, who pledged yesterday to give more freedom to the MACC in the appointment of its officers if BN wins two-thirds control of Parliament in the next general election.

Liew said there was no question of needing a two-thirds majority.

DAP international secretary Liew Chin Tong rubbished the prime minister's remarks, saying that there should be a proper level of consultation with opposition lawmakers on the matter.

"This is nonsense. In principle we agree on empowering the MACC for the betterment of the public. There is no question on needing a two-thirds majority.

"In principle we agree, and think that the MACC should be placed under the jurisdiction of Parliament, and not the Prime Minister's Office," he told The Malaysian Insider.

The Bukit Bendera MP said that in any mature democracy where laws are made, proper consultation on all levels needs to take place.

He said Najib was presumptuous to think PR lawmakers would not agree to some of the recommendations of the advisory panel.

"The opposition is happy to be consulted," he added.

PAS central committee member Dr Mujahid Yusof Rawa stressed that past amendments to the purpose and function of the MACC had already "empowered" the commission, and that the real problem was ensuring the anti-graft body was free from "political interference."

"You don't need two thirds. Issue is not about strengthening, but more of allowing autonomy to MACC to carry out its duties," he told The Malaysian Insider.

"Pakatan Rakyat has agreed to reform measures for the MACC, based on proposals by the

advisory panel," the PAS leader added.

PKR vice-president Nurul Izzah Anwar told The Malaysian Insider that Najib's remarks were an admission that the MACC did not have enough clout to tackle corruption in the country.

Mujahid said the issue was more of giving the MACC the autonomy to carry out its duties. "The people should reject this kind political motivation from a leader. History has shown that when BN rules with a bigger majority, they are not afraid to abuse their powers," she said.

The Bar Council's Lim pointed out that both BN and PR MPs had demonstrated "some amount of maturity" with regards to the bipartisan Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) on electoral reforms.

"Thus there is no reason why this cannot equally be the case with necessary and advantageous amendments to the Federal Constitution," he said.

The lawyer however questioned Najib's mention of a proposal to elevate the status of the MACC chief commissioner to a standing equal to the Attorney-General or Auditor-General, stating that both had different limits to their jurisdiction.

"A question which arises from the PM's statement is the meaning of equal standing of the chief commissioner of MACC to the Honourable Attorney-General and Auditor-General.

"The former has unfettered discretion to prosecute, making him probably the most powerful man in Malaysia. Whilst the latter's powers, duties are prescribed the Audit Act 1957," said the Bar Council president.

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