

Bersih 2.0: Electoral fraud will continue
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 3 — Election watchdog Bersih 2.0 warned Malaysians today that the coming elections would still be fraught with manipulation, claiming the parliamentary select committee's (PSC) electoral reform proposals had fallen short of expectations.

The coalition, which led a rally of thousands in the capital's streets last July to protest unfair election practices in Malaysia, said in a statement here it was "disappointed" that the panel had not sufficiently addressed many of the key concerns it had raised during the chaotic event.

The group did not mention its next planned mammoth rally, rumoured to take place by month's end, but said the Najib administration had sadly missed its "golden opportunity to right the wrongs and do something good for the benefit of Malaysians now and in the future".

"Bersih 2.0 is disappointed that... key issues were not with dealt with at all or were not dealt with in sufficient depth.

"Given this, Bersih 2.0 is of the view that it is highly likely that electoral fraud and other irregularities that are currently being perpetrated in Malaysia... will continue unabated," it said in a statement here.

The group also pointed to two major drawbacks in the PSC's final report tabled today to the Dewan Rakyat — that the existing Election Commission (EC) would have to be the authority to undertake the reforms and that many reform suggestions could have been implemented immediately, instead of delayed further.

"We note that while some recommendations do provide for a timeframe to report back, many others do not.

"The lack of a timeline merely prolongs the dissatisfaction and lack of confidence in the electoral system, and adds to the frustration of the rakyat," Bersih 2.0 said.

The Malaysian Insider reported earlier today claims from sources within the election watchdog that another rally would be held by the end of the month, possible on April 28, to protest the government's failure to implement meaningful reforms to the election process.

This afternoon, the Dewan Rakyat passed the PSC's 22-point report without debate after Pakatan Rakyat (PR) lawmakers, who were also part of the nine-member panel, continued to insist that a minority report be included as part of the panel's final findings.

The minority report would have focused on the assertions and views of the PSC's three PR members, who yesterday had also admitted that the panel had failed to meet its objectives to introduce total reform.

Of the 22 recommendations in the PSC report, the trio had disagreed with four, including the EC's proposal to expand postal voting to include media personnel; a proposal to allow "pre-registration" for voters upon reaching the age of 20; increasing the minimum campaign period from seven to 10 days; and a proposal on automatic voter registration.

Bersih 2.0 said it was "shocked" that the PSC report was passed and adopted by the House today without any debate, adding that this shows a majority of parliamentarians are not very concerned about the extent of irregularities and fraud in the country's election process.

"The majority in Parliament do not appear to appreciate the need to strengthen the electoral process in Malaysia," the group complained.

It added that the PSC report had not touched on specific instances of manipulation in the current electoral roll, such as the illegal removal of names and changes to polling station boundaries.

"Bersih 2.0 is of the view that we cannot proceed to the 13th general election based on this electoral roll," it declared.

"A thorough study ought to have been conducted into the processes of the Election Commission (EC) and the National Registration Department (NRD)," it added.

The coalition also pointed out that the PSC report had not made a single reference to allegations that foreigners here have been granted citizenship and voting rights.

The report also did not touch the issue of election offences and the enforcement of provisions under the Election Offences Act 1954.

"There ought to also have been a study into the types of such offences being committed, and recommendations on how to prevent them.

"Although there is a suggestion that the EC be given more powers to deal with such issues, the PSC does not seek to identify the problems and the clear infringements of the Act," Bersih 2.0 said.

The PSC report, it added, had also not mentioned allowing international observers into the country during polling day or how to stop dirty politics during campaigning.

The group disagreed with the PSC's recommendation to extend the campaign period to up to a mere 10 days, insisting that the minimum duration should be set at 21 days.

"A decision on the campaign period, which we would remind is something that is decided by the EC, should also take into consideration the provision of sufficient time for election candidates to disseminate their election messages to the electorate and for the voter to consider the issues," Bersih 2.0 said.

The bipartisan nine-member PSC was mooted by Datuk Seri Najib Razak last year, months after his administration earned widespread criticism for its handling of Bersih's rally for free and fair elections on July 9.

During the rally, thousands thronged the streets of the capital, defying earlier warnings from the government that their participation would result in arrest.

But the administration's clampdown, which saw more than 1,000 arrested and even one dead, resulted in a massive backlash for Barisan Nasional, including much condemnation in the international media.

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